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Moral Panic 2.0:

White Nationalism, Convergence
Culture, and Racialized Media Events

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Abstract

In the four decades since Stanley Cohen (1972) first theorised the ‘moral panic’, there has been immense technological change in the field of communications and media. Whilst Cohen’s original model relies on elite-driven mediated narratives, I argue that moral panics have taken on a memetic quality in the convergent and participatory mediascape. In other words: in an age of social media, moral panic discourses are increasingly open to contestation, reinterpretation, and recirculation by multiple actors and groups.

In this thesis, I examine one such group – the web’s largest white nationalist (WN) forum, Stormfront. To do so, I trace three racialized media events as they circulate on and through the Forum. Here, I show how the mechanics of the moral panic have fundamentally shifted in the digital age. I explore the means by which Stormfront users exploit this semi-democratised mediascape in an attempt to ‘manage’ and exploit moral panics surrounding episodes of racialized violence. To this end, I explore the topologically entangled shuttling back and forth of ‘online’ and ‘offline’ lives and spaces to argue for a more-than-digital geography of computer mediated communication.

Here, I show how the Forum’s ‘collective voice’ is often given expression through selective quotation by mainstream media surrounding racialized moral panics. This process of remediation, I argue, allows explicitly racist groups fugitive access to mainstream discourse, and turns mainstream media outlets into unwitting nodes in a white nationalist broadcast network. However, I argue that this public-facing process, opens WNs up to increased scrutiny, leading to strategic and contingent deployments of contradictory repertoires of race. In doing so, I examine repertoires of race in such WN interventions - highlighting their flexible and contingent construction of racialized categories in the negotiation of contemporary structures of feeling (Williams 1977; Anderson 2014). I contend that a digitally-inflected antiracism must attend to the contingent, translocal, and assembled nature of racism online if it is to be effective.

Lay Summary

With a sharp rise in far-right politics across Europe and the USA, a better understanding of reactionary racist movements is increasingly pressing. In this thesis I examine the media practices of the web's largest white nationalist (WN) web forum – Stormfront (SF). By tracing three episodes of racist violence as they circulate on and through the site, I explore SF users' understandings and framings of space, as well as their contingent and flexible constructions of race.

Furthermore, I show how SF users' use of digital media has allowed them to easily connect with other WNs - making them easier for antiracists to find, yet harder to attack. I also demonstrate that the boundaries of 'whiteness' and 'otherness' are not clear-cut, and that WN responses to racist violence are as much a reflection of circulating public feeling as they are of ideology. Finally, I contend that social media has allowed such marginal groups greater access to public discourse – allowing them to contest and manage their stigmatized identity through the use of internet memes and viral media.

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	I
DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY	II
TABLE OF FIGURES	III
TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS	IV
 <u>CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION</u>	 <u>1</u>
STORMFRONT: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION.....	8
THREE MOMENTS OF DISCURSIVE TURBULENCE.....	10
THESIS STRUCTURE	21
 <u>CHAPTER 2. (RE)MEDIATION, RACE, AND GEOGRAPHIES OF THE DIGITAL</u>	 <u>27</u>
INTRODUCTION	27
CONVERGENT MEDIASCAPES, (RE)PRODUCERLY TEXTS, AND MORAL PANIC 2.0.....	30
THINKING RACE: RACE-THINKING	45
GEOGRAPHIES OF THE DIGITAL	59
CONCLUSION.....	69
 <u>CHAPTER 3. 'LURKING' AS METHOD: 'MANUFACTURING' FIELD AND ARCHIVE</u>	 <u>71</u>
FORMATIVE FAILURES	73
EVENT-FOCUS	78
DISCURSIVE STRUGGLE AND CONJUNCTURAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS	82

TO 'LURK' OR NOT TO 'LURK'?	85
REFLEXIVE ANTIRACIST RESEARCH	89
 <u>CHAPTER 4. 'NAILING A MILLION PAMPHLETS TO A MILLION TREES':</u>	
<u>TOPOLOGIES AND MATERIALITIES OF CONNECTION</u>	93
INTRODUCTION	93
MATERIALITY AND TOPOLOGY	96
'TELL THE TRUTH AND FEAR NO ONE' – COMMUNITY AND THE SPACE OF 'RIGHTEOUS TRUTH'	120
CONCLUSIONS	126
 <u>CHAPTER 5. 'THE FERGUSON OPPORTUNITY': (MEDIA)(TION), REMEDIATION,</u>	
<u>AND THE MANAGEMENT OF RACIALIZED MORAL PANICS</u>	128
INTRODUCTION	128
MORAL PANICS	130
STORMFRONT'S CONVERGENT MEDIA PRACTICES	145
MEMESIS: PANIC AS MEME	151
FUGITIVE ACCESS TO DISCURSIVE STRUGGLE: REMEDIATION AND STORMFRONT BROADCAST	158
ENTANGLEMENTS OF (WHITE) POWER AND RESISTANCE	163
CONCLUSIONS	166
 <u>CHAPTER 6. 'NO ONE GRIEVES FOR US!': REPERTOIRES OF RACE AND WN</u>	
<u>MORALITY</u>	168

INTRODUCTION	168
REPRESENTATIONS OF 'WHITENESS'	170
REPRESENTATIONS OF 'THE OTHER' – ABSTRACT OBJECTS, CONCRETE SUBJECTS, AND FLEXIBLE MORALITY.....	181
CONCLUSIONS	198
 <u>CHAPTER 7. TOWARD A DIGITALLY-INFLECTED ANTIRACIST PRAXIS</u>	 <u>200</u>
TOPOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHIES OF THE DIGITAL	200
MEDIA AND MORAL PANIC	202
RACISM, MORALITY, AND THE CONTINGENCY OF RACE	204
DIGITAL METHODS.....	206
THE LIMITATIONS OF THIS THESIS	208
FUTURE RESEARCH.....	210
 <u>REFERENCES</u>	 <u>212</u>

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Declaration of originality

I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed entirely by me, that it is my own work, and that it has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed: 

Date: 9 November 2016

Table of figures

Figure 1 - Glenn Miller seig heils at the first public march of the CKKKK	13
Figure 2 – Michael Brown's body lies in the street	15
Figure 3 – Final coding frame	84
Figure 4 - Letter writing	105
Figure 5 - Discussion on letter-writing	106
Figure 6 - Letter from Mirko Viola	107
Figure 7 – Discussion on anonymity	114
Figure 8 - Welcome banner	121
Figure 9 – Discussion on media tactics	134
Figure 10 - Youtube videos posted to SF by @Genseric	148
Figure 11 - Ferguson banner remixed memetically	152
Figure 12 - Image macro meme	154
Figure 13 - Outrage macro meme	155
Figure 14 - Outrage macro meme	155
Figure 15 - Outrage macro meme	157
Figure 16 - Guidelines for posting	162
Figure 17 - Outrage macro meme	177
Figure 18 - Michael Brown	189

Table of abbreviations

(#)BLM – Black Lives Matter

CMC – Computer mediated communication

IRL – In real life

KKK – Ku Klux Klan

MSM – Mainstream media

SF – Stormfront

SPLC – Southern Poverty Law Centre

ZOG – Zionist Occupation Government (so-called)

Chapter 1. Introduction

For the last couple of years the brutal banality of daily life for some people in this country has become visible and undeniable to those who have no immediate connection to it. But nothing new has happened. There has been no spike in police brutality. What's new is that people are looking. And thanks to new technology (namely the democratisation of the ability to film and distribute), they have lots to look at. As a result, a significant section of white America is outraged at the sight of what it had previously chosen to ignore, while a dwindling but still sizeable and vocal few still refuse to believe their eyes.

(Younge 2015)

Everyday my eyes travel across the names of too many deceased and wounded bodies. Too many families overpowered by grief stare back. It is as though the entire world is shifting, like we are on the verge of some kind of reckoning where we have to decide which side of history we are going to stand on.

(Ioanide 2015, p.207)

On April 13th 2014, an ageing white supremacist opened fire at a Jewish community centre in Overland Park, Missouri, killing two people, before driving to a Jewish assisted living facility and killing one further victim. The attacker – Frazier Glenn Miller – was arrested shortly after and, once handcuffed and in the back of a police car, let out a hoary cry of 'heil Hitler.'

On August 9th 2014, an unarmed black teenager named Michael Brown was shot dead by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. The officer – Darren Wilson – claimed that Brown had run at him with a 'demonic' look in his eye. Brown's body lay in the street for more than four hours – a trail of blood snaking out of his lifeless body. Three months later, a Grand Jury ruled that Wilson would face no charges – sparking a protracted period of civil unrest across the United States.

On June 17th 2015, a young white supremacist – Dylann Roof – shot dead nine of the ten parishioners present at a bible meeting he had been attending at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. As he shot, he explained: ‘I have to do this. You rape our women, and you’re taking over our country, and you have to go’. He then fled, and was caught and arrested the next morning in Shelby, North Carolina.

Within minutes of each of these three episodes of racist violence occurring, a discussion thread was started on Stormfront.org (SF) – the web’s largest white nationalist (WN) forum. In each case, the unfolding details were dissected and debated by members in an attempt to make sense of events, whilst strategies for managing increased external scrutiny toward the Forum were developed and deployed. In the cases of Miller and Roof, SF members worked to distance themselves and their movement from the shooters, lest they be tarred with the same brush. In the case of Michael Brown, members celebrated the killing of a ‘black thug,’ and moved to highlight the violent actions of the, largely black, protestors.

White supremacy is part of the fabric of American society. As Patrick Wolfe (2016, p.3) argues, developing Locke’s theory: ‘private property accrued from the admixture of labour and land. As this formula was colour-coded on the colonial ground, Blacks provided the former and Indians the latter, the application of Black people’s labour to Red people’s land producing the white man’s property.’¹ This profiting from

¹ See also, Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2002) who argues that the USA was conceived in slavery and christened in genocide.

racialized bodies is far from an historical anomaly as Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015, pp.131–2) powerfully asserts:

‘The [American] Dreamers [...] accept our bodies as currency, because it is their tradition. As slaves we [African Americans] were this country’s first windfall, the downpayment on its freedom. After the ruin and liberation of the civil war [...] our bodies became this country’s second mortgage. In the New Deal we were their guest room, their finished basement. And today, with a sprawling prison system, which has turned the warehousing of black bodies into a jobs program for Dreamers and a lucrative investment for Dreamers; today, when 8 percent of the world’s prisoners are black men, our bodies have refinanced the Dream of being white.’

Indeed, over the past two decades, carceral expansion (see, Gilmore 2007; McKittrick 2011; Ioanide 2015) and revanchist policing (see, Hall-Blanco & Coyne 2012; Camp & Heatherton 2016) have served to further ossify racialized inequalities.

In response to the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon of 11 September 2001, dominant geopolitical scripts have emerged positioning illiberal Islam as an enemy of the state, and the benevolent USA as an obligated instigator of a ‘war on terror’ (see, Dittmer 2005; Gregory 2011). Such paranoid jingoism has been used to justify the further extension of the carceral state, and the dehumanising treatment of racialized ‘terror suspects’ in facilities such as Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib (see, McClintock 2009). Furthermore, post-9/11 discourses of ‘homeland security’, as well as older policy precedents, such as the ‘war on drugs’, have led to the intense militarization of policing and an increase in racial profiling in the USA (see, Hall-Blanco & Coyne 2012; Balko 2013; Derickson 2016).

With this in mind, the current conjuncture is defined, in part, by the reanimation of mainstream public debate about race and racism (hooks 2013). As Gary Younge (2015) points out above, proliferation in the mediation of racist violence has encouraged

many white Americans to engage with the struggles which Americans of colour have been fighting for decades. The #BlackLivesMatter (#BLM) movement has brought to the fore the racial inequalities which persist in America and further afield (see Garza 2016; Taylor 2016) – leading Emily Bernard (2015) to argue that America has entered ‘the age of Ferguson’.

The election of Barack Obama in 2008 marked a significant conjunctural shift in American politics. For the first time in US history, African Americans could look to the White House and see something of themselves reflected back. Following his inauguration, proclamations of a ‘post-racial’ era proliferated (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich 2012; Fields & Fields 2012; Goldberg 2016). The election of a black man to the highest office in the country was, for some, a sign that racism was no longer an issue.² A cursory glance at the disproportionate number of African Americans who are still killed by police, incarcerated, unemployed, confined to segregated ghettos, and/or are homeless, suggests otherwise (see, Nagel et al. 2015).

It is clear that Obama’s presidency has not delivered the transformational change that many had hoped for.³ Furthermore, Drawing on David Theo Goldberg (2009b), Enck-Wanzer (2011) argues that Obama performs a form of *anti-racialism* rather than *antiracism* in office. Where the latter requires historical memory, according to Goldberg (2009a, p.21), the former suggests ‘forgetting, getting over, moving on, wiping

² As evidenced in a *Wall Street Journal* editorial: ‘One promise of his [Obama’s] victory is that perhaps we can put to rest the myth of racism as a barrier to achievement in this splendid country’ (Anon 2008).

³ Indeed, Younge (2016) offers a generous but critical evaluation of Obama’s two terms by arguing ‘yes, he tried’ - a post-hoc tempering of the optimism in Obama’s 2008 campaign slogan ‘yes we can.’

away the terms of reference.’ Indeed, Obama (in Dingle 2012) himself argues that he is ‘not the president of black America [... but] the president of the United States of America.’⁴

The emergence of #BLM during the rule of America’s first black president, then, was no coincidence, asserts Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (2016). Taylor argues that the promise of progressive change to be delivered by black political participation at the highest level has already come and failed in the form of Obama. Furthermore, Taylor (2016, p.79) argues that the #BLM movement have been let down by black elites who: ‘obscure their actions under a cloak of imagined racial solidarity, while ignoring their role as arbiters of political power who willingly operate in a political terrain designed to exploit and oppress African Americans and other working-class people.’ It is in this context that the #BLM movement inevitably formed through grassroots organizing in defence of black humanity (Garza 2016).

Whatever putative promise of change Obama represented for Americans of colour, his rhetoric of transformation represented a ‘frightful threat’ to, largely older, white conservatives (Skocpol & Williamson 2012, p.82). Centuries of social, economic, and political white hegemony was challenged by what he represented. This racialized fear was channelled into political action, and immediately following Obama’s inauguration, neo-conservative Republicans mobilised under the banner of the Tea Party (Skocpol & Williamson 2012; Parker & Barreto 2014). With racism at its core, the

⁴ Tim Wise (2013) argues that many white voters voted for Obama on the grounds that he was less than truly black and had transcended race – proving that racism operated powerfully in the life of the nation.

Tea Party set about trying to disprove Obama's eligibility for the presidency, demanding that he provide legal proof of his birth in the USA (see, Hughey 2012).

Whilst this seemingly loose alliance claimed to be funded and organised by its 'grassroots', Barreto *et al* (2012, pp.108–9) show that up to twenty percent of funding came from corporations and much of the public relations and logistical work was done by Republican advocacy groups. Furthermore, Barreto *et al* (2012) argue that the Tea Party represents an extension of the extreme right politics of McCarthyism and the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). Certainly, as the Tea Party grew, it spawned and emboldened more extreme right organisations such as the so-called Patriot Movement and white nationalist groups (Beirich & Potok 2009; Potok 2012). In recent years, another, more amorphous, racist phenomenon – the 'alt-right' – has been growing steadily, taking advantage of digital media and the logics of spreadability. This movement is predicated upon promoting white patriarchal values by rebuking the 'political correctness' of the so-called 'liberal left', and it has become an influential force in the spread of racist and right wing ideologies (see, SPLC 2016).

It could be argued that this 'great moving right show', as Hall (1979) might have described it, laid the groundwork for the rise and success of Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump. Mobilising post-9/11 Islamophobia and intense fear of immigration, Trump has brought explicit racism and xenophobia back to the heart of American politics. Campaigning under the slogan of 'Make America Great Again', Trump has called for a ban on Muslims entering the country, vowed to build a wall to keep out Mexican 'rapists', and received public endorsements from neo-Nazis and the Klan (see, Osnos 2016). It is in this context that my work is situated – tracing

the circulating discourses on and through a WN web forum over this period – to consider how best to understand and counter organised racism online.

In this thesis, then, I argue that the topological forms of connection fostered by digital communication have allowed racists to form relatively ‘safe’ discursive spaces of ‘collective feeling’ (Ahmed 2004a). Tracing the circulation of the three racialized media events above as they moved through SF, I go on to argue that the forum fulfils an important strategic role in the contestation of media narratives and the management of stigmatizing discourses. Here, I show how the mechanics of the moral panic have fundamentally shifted in the digital age – now subject to greater counter-discursive contestation and (re)appropriation than ever before. In so doing, I examine the ways in which these three events circulated on SF, and the means by which members exploited them to access (re)mediated circuits of meaning-making. Finally, I examine repertoires of race in such WN interventions - highlighting their flexible and contingent construction of racialized categories in the negotiation of contemporary structures of feeling (Williams 1977; Anderson 2014).

Whilst many studies of racism online have shifted focus from older forms of digital connection to newer social media (e.g. Bartlett et al. 2011; Hirvonen 2013; Hughey & Daniels 2013; Horsti 2015), I argue in this thesis, that it is not yet time to retire the web forum as a site of research. Stormfront is a key site of WN ideological debate and (re)construction, and this alone is worthy of further study. However, I show that the Forum also acts as an important site of discursive struggle as a hyper-visible platform for the WN movement during racialized media events. In these moments, I argue, the Forum turns outward, using such incidents, and the intense media attention they command, as opportunities for WN broadcast.

Stormfront: a brief introduction

In April 1981 KKK Imperial Wizard Don Black was arrested in Louisiana, along with nine other white supremacists, as they loaded a boat with weapons and a Nazi flag *en route* to overthrow the small Caribbean island of Dominica (Newton 2010). He was charged with violating the Federal Neutrality Act and sentenced to three years in a federal prison. It was whilst serving this sentence that Black learned the computer programming skills which would eventually help him to create SF in 1995 (SPLC 2015a).

‘White supremacy,’ Jessie Daniels (2009b, p.3) proclaims, ‘has entered the digital era,’ and this is clearly demonstrated by the ever-growing membership of racist sites such as SF, Vanguard News Network Forum, and the Daily Stormer. Indeed, Stormfront, in particular, was one of the earliest adopters of the digital medium and has been a key hub of ‘cyber racism’ (Back 2002a). When SF started, it was a simple bulletin board running on a single phone line from Black’s West Palm Beach home. Over the past twenty one years it has grown into a sprawling web forum with 314,000 members, 12 million posts and 927,000 threads, spread across 146 sub-fora.⁵ The site took its current format in 2001, and has changed little since.

Signing into the Forum, it is instantly apparent that this is an outdated and outmoded platform by the standards of today’s social media environment – and, yet, it is still the largest and most active WN forum on the web. I explore this seeming anomaly in Chapter Four, arguing that SF represents a translocal technosocial

⁵ All figures correct as of 31 July 2016.

assemblage (McFarlane 2009) which is maintained – both technologically and socially – by the constant work of its founder and a team of moderators. When I interviewed Ryan Lenz, an investigative journalist from the Southern Poverty Law Center, he explained that a large part of Stormfront’s enduring appeal was its founder:

SF is run by Don Black, who's one of the more iconic men in the movement. He is a true believer and has been obsessed with this in all forms, almost since his becoming as a man. There aren't a lot of iconic figures any more. There aren't a lot of young kids coming up who have the charisma enough to rally people in the real world. Don's done that, and he's done it online too. [...] If you're a serious member of the racist right, you're going to be on SF saying something. (Ryan Lenz, SPLC, personal interview)

Black’s offline activism, it seems, lends legitimacy to his online presence, and this is something I explore more in Chapter Four.

Ideologically, the Forum is predominantly populated by white nationalists, who believe that so-called races must have their own separate and sovereign nations (Swain 2002).⁶ Consequently, the Forum divides into a number of national sub-fora, though the main Forum tends to be dominated by North American interests. While discussion is dominated by racial ideologies, the Forum maintains a broad range of sub-fora on banal topics such as homemaking, poetry, and dating, alongside more sinister subjects such as historical revisionism, self-defence and preparedness, and ‘the truth about Martin Luther King.’ SF members pride themselves on the Forum’s supposed intellectualism, and, in this respect, it is qualitatively different from most other racist sites I have visited. There is an unusual air of civility, which founder Don Black is clearly keen to cultivate in

⁶ This is supplemented by a small number of neo-Nazis, Odinists, and Identity Christians.

pursuit of legitimacy, by imposing strict rules against the use of swearing and racial epithets.

The Forum's longevity and constant activity has made it a fertile site for researching the racist right. Daniels (2009b; 2009a), for example, examines the insidious nature of SF propaganda, but argues that most recruitment still takes place 'offline;' De Koster and Houtman (2008), Bowman-Grieve (2009), and Caren *et al* (2012) all give accounts of SF as a relatively self-contained virtual community; whilst Meddaugh and Kay (2009) assert that the Forum performs a mediatory role between extreme and 'respectable' racisms. There has been little attention, however, to the role of the Forum in advancing racist agendas beyond its own relatively bounded web protocols, and largely-sympathetic prospective members. It is this outward-facing function which I explore in this thesis, through examining three case studies.

Three moments of discursive turbulence

The three episodes of racist violence explored in this thesis, diverge sharply in terms of the victims and perpetrators. My intention, in this thesis, is not to compare these cases, or to analyse and contrast the racialized experience of African Americans and Jews in contemporary American society. This would be another project. Instead, I argue that the three events I present here, are paradigmatic examples of conjunctural violent racism in the USA. Each surfaced during the course of my research and provided a useful site of discursive turbulence (see, Fiske 1996) for my analysis. Each of these passed through SF as they unfolded, and were appropriated, remixed, and recirculated by SF members. In this section, I outline each in detail.

Frazier Glenn Miller

On April 12th 2014, a 73-year-old ex-military man headed to a Missouri casino for an evening of drinking and gambling. The next day, he called his wife early to say that 'his winnings were up and all was well' (Beirich 2014a). By 8:30pm on April 13th, the police were at her door to explain why he hadn't made it home. He had driven to a Jewish community centre on Overland Park – just outside Kansas City – and opened fire on people entering and exiting the building, puncturing the celebratory Passover Eve atmosphere, and killing two people. He then moved on to a Jewish assisted living facility where he again opened fire, killing one more. He was arrested outside a school shortly after and went peacefully with police officers. Once in custody, the man yelled 'heil Hitler' from the back of a police car (Smith & McCallister 2014). After identifying the three victims, it became clear that Miller had killed three Christians. In fact, *The New York Times* ran a story on the shootings which conflated whiteness with Christianity, accepting Miller's essentialising anti-Semitism. It closed with the line: 'A few hours later, a handcuffed Mr. Miller was shouting allegiance to Hitler, while *three white people*, two Methodists and a Catholic, lay dead' (Yaccino & Barry 2014 my emphasis).

Frazier Glenn Miller - also known as Frazier Glenn Cross - grew up in North Carolina before he joined the US army - serving twenty years, including two tours in Vietnam. In 1979 he was discharged from military service for distributing racist literature. He took up trucking. Throughout his life, Miller was very active in WN politics, setting up the paramilitary structured Carolina Knights of the KKK whose members were implicated in the Greensboro massacre in 1979. In the mid 1980s, that

organisation became the White Patriot Party (WPP) - a similarly paramilitary group which advocated Southern secession and attempted to foment a violent race war in a mass-produced letter in 1989 which drew up a scoring system for the murder of:

Niggers (1), other assorted mongrels (Mexicans, etc) (2), Jews (10), influential Jews (25), Queers (5), White Race traitors (10), Scalawags (10), Carpet-baggers (10), Abortionists (20), Race traitor politicians and Judges (50), Informants and government witnesses (50), Morris Segilman Dees [founder of the SPLC] (888) (Miller 2014)

Even at this stage the SPLC, and Dees in particular, were WN enemy number one for the anti-racist work that they did.

Later in 1987 Miller was indicted for planning a string of robberies and the assassination of Morris Dees. Given the opportunity to reduce his sentence, Miller took a plea bargain and testified against fourteen WN leaders in a sedition trial (SPLC 2015b). Understandably, this move lost him a lot of credibility in the WN movement and he became known as a 'race traitor' (Beirich, 2015 – SPLC – personal interview).

Before the internet, Miller was an indefatigable letter writer. He wrote tirelessly to his local newspaper with short comment pieces and racist jokes. Editors published every tenth or twelfth letter in the interest of balance, but often found themselves at the sharp end of anti-racist criticism as a result (Don Terry, 2015 – SPLC – personal interview). When the internet started to become publicly accessible, Miller shifted his seemingly endless energies to the new medium. He was still putting out similar material, but now he had a personal platform and, on the whole, a more sympathetic audience. He was a prolific contributor to the Neo-Nazi web forum Vanguard News Network,

where under the username of *@Rounder* he has racked up 12,683⁷ posts since he joined in 2004. VNN was a mouthpiece for Miller, who was a solid supporter of its founder, Alex Linder.



Figure 1 - Glenn Miller seig heils at the first public march of the CKKKK - June 1st 1982

(source IREHR, 2014)

Responses to Miller's actions across the WN webspace were mixed. Most were sceptical of what the act would achieve, especially given the profile of the victims. Some on VNN lamented the mental and emotional decline of one of the movement's most active members and strongest advocates. Others were more vitriolic about the perceived damage that this act may have done to their cause. SF was less sympathetic and the main discussion thread on the matter was re-titled 'Race-mixing FBI informant Glenn Miller indicted for 'Hate Crime' murder of 3 Whites in Kansas' once Miller's ID was made public. Following an SPLC statement linking Miller to a number of WN forums, Don

⁷ Correct at the time of writing - 29 June 2015.

Black moved to put distance between Miller and SF claiming that ‘Miller had never been allowed to post here [SF]’ (@Don Black – SF – 17.04.14).

Miller’s actions seemed to split the movement along the lines of ideological proclivity to violence. The debates which surfaced on SF around this time are analysed in detail later. They show an interesting equivocal and contingent moralising effort that relies heavily on scale. The action, which focused on a community centre and old folk’s home, was seen to be counter-productive due to the scale of the attack and the parochial nature of the victims. A similar tendency can be seen in the case of Dylann Roof, which I outline below, where the target of a black church is seen to be inappropriate and monstrous, whilst ‘going into the ghetto’ would have been a heroic attack at the heart of the so-called black problem. This highlights the relational nature of race and the individual exceptionalism which is apparent in the WN movement. This also ties into arguments about Jews and ‘The Jew’ as an abstract figure/entity.

Michael Brown

Around midday on August 9th 2014, in Ferguson, a suburb of St Louis, Missouri, an unarmed 18-year-old black man – Michael Brown – was shot dead in an altercation with a white cop. The officer, Darren Wilson, unloaded 12 rounds in an attempt to halt the young man as he allegedly ran at Wilson. Brown would later be described by Wilson as ‘demonic’ in a testimonial defence of his actions (Sanburn 2014). Within days news emerged that Michael Brown had been a suspect in a robbery at a nearby convenience store where he was alleged to have stolen some cigarettes. This was presented as further evidence that Brown was a criminal ‘who had it coming’.



Figure 2 – Michael Brown's body lies in the street (source: St Louis Post-Dispatch)

As Brown lay there dead, for more than four hours, it seemed as though this black body had no human value to police. The street became a space of public mourning and anger. Whilst crowds gathered on the residential street, officers draped a white blanket over him, leaving part of his head, his legs and his arms exposed. One local resident speculated as to why Brown was left lying for so long: ‘They shot a black man, and they left his body in the street to let you all know this could be you [...] To set an example, that’s how I see it.’ (quoted in Hunn & Bell 2014)

This fatal coupling of power and difference (Gilmore, 2002)⁸ – which positions the racialized ‘other’ as disposable – is no new thing in Ferguson, or the USA. Michael Brown’s shooting came only a year after the high profile acquittal of George Zimmerman over the fatal shooting of an unarmed African American 17-year-old – Trayvon Martin – in Florida. Tensions quickly flared in Ferguson, and the next day a

⁸ Gilmore (2002, p.16) describes this process as ‘[the] death-dealing displacement of difference into hierarchies that organize relations within and between the planet’s sovereign political territories.’

vigil for Brown became the focus of a standoff with police. Years of oppression – absorbed and assimilated – bubbled to the surface and four months of sporadic violent protest ensued. Dr. Martin Luther King’s insistence that ‘a riot is the language of the unheard’ (CBS 2013) could hardly have been more prescient.

At the early stages of the story, SF attention was minimal with a few small threads popping up to dissect the shooting. In general, the case was held as an example of the inherent criminality, aggression and behavioural exceptionalism of black people:

It all boils down to ‘black anger’. It was also what killed Trevon Martin. The blacks think that they can do whatever they want. If someone dares to question them or hold them accountable, they want to go into a rage. (@Silverwing88)⁹

Justifications were made for the shooting, including comments which drew on personal (white) experience with the police and allegations that Brown had reached for Wilson’s gun. Users also mocked the victim’s family’s insistence that Brown was innocent, spreading the phrase ‘HE DIN DO NUFFIN’ (@prondtobewhite95) which quickly became a racist internet meme as the name of a parodic fictional character of Dindu Nuffins who epitomized the perceived lack of responsibility taken by black men for their stereotypically violent and lascivious behaviour.

The Grand Jury took three months to reach a verdict on the culpability of Officer Darren Wilson. In the weeks preceding the deadline of the verdict in early November 2014, US mainstream media hypothesised on the result and fanned the

⁹ All quotes from SF users included in this thesis are taken from my empirical research. I attribute quotes to the users’ SF handle preceded by an @ symbol for clarity. The standard of spelling and punctuation varies greatly, and quotes are reproduced verbatim. Therefore, I dispense with the convention of flagging errors with *sic erat scriptum*, to avoid breaking up the flow of the text.

flames of tensions across the country. On November 10th, a thread was started on SF by @EricPowers ahead of the verdict. There was a flurry of speculation, and the thread became a key source of information to many hundreds of users and ‘lurkers’. The thread remains the sixth most commented on in the Newslinks and Articles sub-forum. Users predicted a riot – or ‘chimpout’ (@proudtobewhite95) in unsurprisingly racist SF parlance – and joked that they were settling down with popcorn to watch the unfolding ‘entertainment’.

At 9:15pm Eastern Time on November 10th, St. Louis County Prosecuting Attorney Bob McCulloch appeared to give the verdict. He spoke at length before revealing the Jury’s decision, making a number of controversial and inflammatory statements about protesters, the mainstream media, and the use of social media. The verdict came ten minutes into his calm diatribe. No probable cause was found to file any charge against Officer Darren Wilson.

The minutes, hours, and days following the announcement were fraught in Ferguson and a number of other metropolitan areas across the USA. The immediate reaction seemed to be one of disbelief. For many, the evidence showed that Michael Brown had his hands in the air. This spawned the slogan ‘hands up, don’t shoot’ (Poe 2015), which, along with the last words of another unarmed black man killed by police in 2014, ‘I can’t breathe’, epitomised the black experience in the USA and came to be a rallying call for activists the world over. The full force of militarized policing was meted out on protesters in Ferguson and the National Guard was called out to deal with what they described in internal documents as ‘enemy forces’ (Sanburn 2015). Many businesses were looted and fires burned across the city.

SF was a hive of activity throughout this period and multiple police scanner radio channels were being shared and commentated upon. The unrest was quickly dismissed on the Forum as ‘typical nigger behaviour’ (TNB) (@*Helasson*). Much of the racialized mainstream moral panic surrounding the reaction in Ferguson was reproduced and amplified on SF with a discourse emerging that posited black protesters as puppets of the Zionist Occupied Government (ZOG). This served to deny the agency of protesters and to produce an abstract target for WN hatred.

The media events in Ferguson spanned a number of months, following the ebb and flow of pivotal moments in the case and subsequent unrest. The (often fatally) subordinate position of black people in the US came under scrutiny as a result of this case and a number of similar incidents around that time. Simultaneously, another set of discourses highlighted the dangerous and uncivilised nature of African Americans. It is this latter discourse that feeds the violent actions which make up my final case-study – the shooting of 9 black parishioners at an African American church in Charleston, SC.

Dylann Roof

On the evening of June 17th, a 21-year-old white man, Dylann Storm Roof, from Columbia, S.C. joined bible study at the Emanuel African American Church in Charleston, S.C. He was unfamiliar, but the all-black congregation welcomed him in and he sat for an hour with them as they worked through *The Book*. Eventually – though somewhat shamefacedly due to the congregation’s generosity (Guion 2015) – Roof stood and produced a handgun that had been given to him by his uncle at his last birthday. He is alleged to have said: ‘I have to do it [...] you rape our women, and you’re

taking over our country, and you have to go' (Glenza 2015). With that, he opened fire, killing nine.

Roof was caught nearly 250 miles away in Shelby, N.C. and taken into police custody alive and with minimal drama. This was in sharp contrast to the killing of Michael Brown whose only alleged crime was the theft of some cigarettes. Over the next few hours, small pieces of information leaked into the public sphere. Roof's Facebook page was found. His friends list was scrutinized (many were black). His personal website – lastrhodesian.com – was discovered to contain a manifesto which aimed to explain the twisted reasoning behind Roof's actions. In it he writes:

I have no choice. I am not in the position to, alone, go into the ghetto and fight. I chose Charleston because it is most historic city in my state, and at one time had the highest ratio of blacks to Whites in the country. We have no skinheads, no real KKK, no one doing anything but talking on the internet. Well someone has to have the bravery to take it to the real world, and I guess that has to be me.

In light of this document, there was little doubt as to the motive for the shooting. The web page also contained a cache of photographs of Roof posing with the Confederate battle flag; burning the US flag; wearing a bomber jacket bearing the apartheid-era Rhodesian flag; and toting a pistol.

The right-wing sections of the US media and citizenry were unconvinced by the weight of the evidence that this was a hate crime. This evidence included Roof's statement in the church and the fact that he left one female parishioner alive to 'tell others what happened' (Eversley 2015). Anger grew on the left in the US around the continued flying over the South Carolina state capitol of the Confederate battle flag, a potent symbol for so many of America's brutally racist past.

After establishing that he was white, SF users were quick to distance themselves from Roof's actions, branding him a thug and airing their frustrations at the damage he might have caused to the WN movement. Some even sent condolences to the African American families, from their white nationalist forum. Such sympathy was punctured here and there by a more moralising attitude which, whilst condemning the target, didn't condemn racist violence per se:

'If you want to shoot Muds, wait until they riot like they did in LA or Baltimore and then go weapons free. That's race war. Shooting up a bunch of civilians in a church is evil, cowardly and worst of all, counter productive 😡' (@CelticUbermensch – SF – 18.06.15).

The individual details of each of these media events are contingent and specific in important ways. Most obviously, the perpetrators and victims vary significantly. However, articulated together,¹⁰ they demonstrate something of the current conjuncture's specific racialized politics and their contemporary mediation.¹¹ In this way, these stories, and their remediation on and through SF, provide insights into the workings of contemporary moral panics, the topologies of more-than-digital connectibility, and capricious and contingent processes of racialization. Having established the concrete context in which this thesis is situated, I now outline the structure.

¹⁰ Here, I use articulation in the cultural studies sense of a complex unity (Hall 1980).

¹¹ See Hall (1980; 1986) on the centrality of the conjunctural to the study of race and racism.

Thesis structure

'Media events' and discursive struggle

My approach in this thesis (outlined in detail in **Chapter Three**) is informed in particular by John Fiske's (1996) *Media Matters*. In it, Fiske charts the 'racial, sexual and economic conflicts' (p.xiii) of the US, as they played out in key media events of the 1990s. A *media event*, then, 'is a composite reality comprising everything from the process of videoing the original event through to its uncountable viewings and reviewings [...] A media event is hypervisual, for besides its condensation of social antagonisms, it is technologically distributed and thus inserted into unpredictably different social contexts' (Fiske 1996, p.126). Elsewhere Fiske (2000, n.p.) argues that: 'no social event proscribes what discourse we use to describe it, it's our choice as users of language. And the way we make the choice of which discourse to put a particular event in, is an extremely important thing to understand.' It is these different and often competing social contexts and choices which produce what Fiske describes as discursive struggle, and it is SF members' efforts to participate in that struggle, in part, that this thesis is about.

The three events outlined above were all mediated and remediated. Each told its own story, but was articulated, disarticulated, and rearticulated into different circulating discursive currents. On one hand, for example, the case of Michael Brown was articulated with other episodes of racist violence against black men (e.g. Hunn & Bell 2014; Sanburn 2014; Poe 2015). On the other hand, his death was articulated with tropes of black crime and violence as if to justify Officer Wilson's actions (Barrabi 2014; Eligon 2014). The politics of these discursive framings are vastly different, and, as Fiske (2000) argues above, it is crucial to understand the discursive choices that have been

made. With this in mind, in this thesis I explore the discursive choices of SF members in their framing of the perpetrators and victims of racist violence. As '[points] of maximum discursive visibility' (Fiske 1996, p.8), high-profile media events give me the best vantage point from which to chart the circulation of particular racialized discursive currents. As these have flowed from the event to the everyday and back again, I have been able to examine WN strategies of discursive struggle.

Topologies and materialities of 'the Digital'

In **Chapter Four**, I trace the topologies which produce, and are produced by, SF. Building on Les Back's (2002a) early work on translocal whiteness, I deploy Serres and Latour's (1995) topological focus on connectibility rather than proximity, to interrogate WN spatial imaginaries. Here, I argue that the potential for relatively anonymous connection has made it easier for would-be racists to 'dip their toe' in the murky waters of organized racism without the commitment of face-to-face meetings. However, I also show what can happen when cyberspace touches down, highlighting both the vulnerability and endurance of such networks.

In this chapter, I also join others (e.g. Madge 2007; Kitchin & Dodge 2011; Kinsley 2014) in problematizing the online/offline binary by considering the materiality of so-called 'cyberspaces'. Here, I explore the entangled shuttling back and forth of 'online' and 'offline' lives and spaces to argue for a more-than-digital geography of computer mediated communication. I draw on Sara Ahmed's (2004a) work on 'collective feelings' and 'orientations' to argue that SF represents a protected space of WN 'righteous truth' which negatively positions the racialized 'other.' With this in mind,

I contend that a digitally-inflected antiracism must attend to the translocal and assembled (see, McFarlane 2009) nature of racism online if it is to be effective.

Moral panics and WN media strategy

In **Chapter Five**, I argue that moral panics are essential to the continuing project of white nationalism. These allow WNs to maintain a critical level of anxiety – essential for fuelling fearful racist narratives (see, Wodak 2015). In the four decades since Stanley Cohen (1972) first theorised the ‘moral panic’, there has been immense technological change in the field of communications and media (see also, Hall et al. 1978). Whilst Cohen’s original model relies on the broadcast of a relatively linear narrative, the contemporary mediascape’s more democratised and convergent nature sees a departure from predominantly elite-engineered discourses (see, Jenkins 2006; Kenix 2011; Aupers 2012; Sheller 2014; Highfield 2016).

In this chapter, I make what I see as the main contribution of this thesis, arguing for a fundamental re-thinking of the mechanics of the moral panic in the digital age.¹² I mobilise and extend Fiske’s (1996) concepts of discursive struggle and the producerly text, to contend that contemporary moral panics are open to memetic contestation. Indeed, during racialized media events, SF members turn their usually introspective discourse outward in a form of WN public relations. Here, I argue that WNs face both *unfavourable* and *favourable* moral panics. Where the former target whiteness or white

¹² Here, I go beyond pre-social media efforts to re-theorise the concept (see, McRobbie & Thornton 1995; de Young 1998).

supremacy and must be ‘managed’, the latter revolve around the threat of the ‘other’, and can be exploited and amplified. Furthermore, I show that, in reporting on racialized media events, mainstream media often uncritically remediate SF discourse, giving them implicit legitimacy and a kind of fugitive access to the heart of the racialized discursive struggle. This journalistic practice, I argue, problematically turns mainstream media¹³ outlets into unwitting nodes in a WN broadcast network, amplifying explicitly racist voices.

Contingency of race and flexible morality

In the final empirical chapter of this thesis, **Chapter Six**, I turn my attention to repertoires of race on SF, in an attempt to better understand WNs’ discursive and ideological contortions. Here, I argue that, whilst race is at the core of WN ideology, SF members’ use of racialized categories is often contradictory and inconsistent. In the context of episodes of racist violence, I argue, SF members draw a distinction between the ‘other’ as abstract stereotypical object and concrete ‘grievable’ subject (see, Butler 2006; 2009). For example, whilst Michael Brown’s death was celebrated on SF and justified by painting the teenager as a thug, Roof’s victims were mourned and his actions condemned. Following Antonio Gramsci (1971, p.178) – who contends that ‘it is upon [the terrain of the conjunctural] that the forces of opposition organise’ – I argue that this flexible racialization allows WNs to negotiate prevailing structures of feeling.¹⁴

¹³ I problematize this notion below.

¹⁴ In other words, the collective mood which serves to structure conjunctural politics.

Finally, I argue that there is a necropolitical imperative at play here (Mbembe 2003), which seals Brown into ‘crushing objecthood’ at the hands of the state, whilst the extra-state killing of ‘civilians’ cannot be condoned.

Towards a digitally-inflected antiracist praxis

In **Chapter Seven**, I conclude by making suggestions for further research and offering some reflections on effective digitally-inflected antiracist praxis. Here, I consider the consequences of a topological understanding of the Forum for antiracism, advocating for the continuity of locally-specific antiracist activism.¹⁵ Furthermore, I argue that efforts to ‘smash’ a forum like SF¹⁶ are both overly macho, and counterproductive. The translocally assembled nature of the Forum means that closing the webspace of Stormfront.org would do little to abate the circulation of racist ideas and discourse.

In this thesis, then, I argue that SF represents a topological network of WN connectibility, allowing likeminded activists to come together in relative anonymity. During racialized media events, this community mobilises as a broadcast node to intervene in circulating narratives. Exploiting increased media attention to the forum, members attempt to manage moral panics which are unfavourable to a WN agenda, and amplify those which are favourable. Mainstream media (MSM) remediation of SF comment produces a problematically symbiotic relationship whereby news outlets

¹⁵ See Danny Miller (2011) on the local specificity of the internet.

¹⁶ A strategy advocated by Heidi Beirich of the SPLC in a personal interview with me.

become nodes in a WN broadcast network. Even so, WNs must work within the limits of prevailing structures of feeling, leading to strategically flexible and contingent processes of racialization and moral judgement. In the next chapter, I turn to the literatures which inform these arguments.

Chapter 2. (Re)mediation, race, and geographies of the digital

Introduction

In this thesis, I argue that the convergent mediascape has changed the ways in which white nationalists (WNs) organise and communicate across and within space. This changing pattern of communication, I argue, has also allowed WNs greater access to circulating discursive currents. Through embracing participatory web-cultural practices, I argue, WNs are often able to remix and redirect such currents. This public-facing process, however, opens WNs up to increased scrutiny, and this leads to strategic and contingent deployments of contradictory repertoires of race.

This thesis sits at the intersection of a number of literatures. In this chapter, I bring these together around three broad arguments which emerge through the empirical chapters to come. These are: (1) moral panics have become memetic in the ‘digital age’; (2) race and morality are contingent and flexible – even in white nationalist discourse; (3) the topologies and materialities of the web require new approaches to antiracism. To this end, the chapter is divided into three sections, exploring convergent mediascapes and moral panic, race-thinking, and the geographies of the digital, before concluding.

In the first section, I rethink Cohen (1972) and Hall *et al*’s (1978) seminal works on the phenomena of moral panics and the framing of ‘deviance’, to take account of unprecedented advances in media and communications technologies. To do so, I bring the moral panic literature into conversation with work on media convergence (see, Jenkins 2006; Strover 2013; Glynn 2015) and participatory web culture (see, Deuze

2006; Beer & Burrows 2010; McCosker & Johns 2014; Theocharis 2015) to argue that moral panics have become more participatory in the digital age. In this section, I explore the growing literature on digital activist publics (see, Rahimi 2011; Papacharissi 2014; McCosker 2015) and everyday politics online (Beer & Burrows 2010; Lievrouw 2006; Baym 2015; Highfield 2016).

Here, I show how power over the direction of moral panics is increasingly ceded to, and grasped by, competing interest groups, who remix and recirculate moral panic discourses memetically (see, Shifman 2013; Miltner 2014; Shifman 2014). Thus, I expand on Fiske's (1996) concepts of the producerly text and discursive struggle to argue that moral panics represent (re)producerly texts, where content and direction are collaboratively (re)produced between reader and text.

In the second section I explore contemporary race-thinking, grounding affective and structural approaches in the case of the shooting of Michael Brown. Through this section, I show the trajectory of my own thinking on race, and justify the flexible theoretical approach of this thesis. Whilst I fully accept that structure and affect do not exist in binary opposition (e.g. Grossberg 1996; Anderson 2014; Berlant 2015), I argue in this section that they nonetheless need to be held in creative tension. I assert that accounts which foreground the structural do different theoretical work to those which foreground the affective, and that both are necessary in order to gain a fuller understanding of the complex workings of race and racism.

I first examine the case of Michael Brown using approaches which emphasise the structural bases of race and racism (e.g. Bonilla-Silva 1997; Bonilla-Silva 2006; Feagin 2006; Feagin 2010b; Doane & Bonilla-Silva 2013; Goldberg 2014; Wolfe 2016), showing that these are often tied to explicit political projects, but lack the subjective

sensibilities which Grada Kilomba (2013) argues are so important in analysing racism. Next, I explore affective and more-than-representational approaches (Ahmed 2004b; Ahmed 2006; Saldanha 2007; Saldanha & Adams 2012), highlighting the importance of everyday lived experience and the cultural politics of encounter to understandings of race. Finally, I draw on work in cultural studies and cultural geography which articulates structural and affective approaches. Raymond Williams' (1977) notion of 'structures of feeling' is useful here, in bringing together the structural significance of circulating moods and affects. In examining responses to the three case studies presented in this thesis, I find that Judith Butler's (2006; 2009) work on 'grievability' and Achille Mbembe's (2003) thinking on 'necropolitics' are illuminating in thinking about how the role of circulating affects and the role of the state modulate reactions to episodes of racist violence.

In the final section, I explore the geographies of the digital and the workings of race and racism in digital spaces. Through attention to the materiality which grounds so-called 'cyberspaces' I hope to avoid the reductive online/offline binary critiqued in so much recent work (Turkle 2011; Kinsley 2014; Baym 2015; Boellstorff 2016). Importantly, I argue, this more-than-digital geography extends beyond the code and infrastructure which is often highlighted in work on the integration of the digital and physical worlds (e.g. Hansen 2006; Kitchin & Dodge 2011; Ash et al. 2016). Furthermore, drawing on recent debates in geography (e.g. Allen 2009; Allen 2011; Coleman 2011; Shields 2012; Hinchliffe et al. 2013; Lury 2013; Martin & Secor 2014; Dixon & Jones 2015; Lata & Minca 2016), I argue that the digital is best understood topologically, through metaphors of folded and crumpled space. Here, I argue, a focus

on connectibility, rather than proximity (see, Serres & Latour 1995; Latour 1996), calls for rethinking digitally-inflected antiracist praxis.

Bringing together literatures on race/racism, media, the digital, materialities, and topologies, allows me to show the pernicious work of racism in diverse, but related, contexts. More importantly, in the conclusion to this thesis, I hope to open up lines of further enquiry and suggest some useful directions for a digitally-and-topologically-inflected antiracist praxis. First, though, I turn to the literature on the convergent mediascape to help me re-theorise notions of the moral panic.

Convergent mediascapes, (re)producerly texts, and moral panic 2.0

One of the core arguments of this thesis is that the mechanics of moral panics have fundamentally changed as a result of the proliferation of new and social media. I argue that increased access to circuits of mediated meaning-making has effectively democratized moral panics, opening them up to contestation and remixing by a broad range of actors. Therefore, this section begins by exploring the literature on ‘old’, mainstream, alternative, and ‘new’ media, problematizing such clear distinctions in an age of media convergence. This leads me to a discussion of (re)mediation and internet memes – remixed forms of spreadable media (see, Wiggins & Bowers 2015). Finally, I apply these debates to the concept of moral panic to take account of social media in the convergent mediascape.

Complicating the MSM, 'New' Media, and alternative media

Phrases such as mainstream media, alternative media, and new media, have become commonplace in both academic and popular discourse (Lievrouw 2011). Each gives the sense of a clear distinction in relation to the others, predicated on technological advances and ideological positioning (Atton 2002a). However, Henry Jenkins (2006) wrote a decade ago about the increasing convergence of media production, consumption, and ownership – arguing that ‘new’ media forms merely shift the function and status of ‘old’ forms, rather than displacing them. More recently, and with an increasingly frenetic ‘news now’ culture (Sheller 2014), the imbrication of ‘new’ and social media with mainstream – the amateur with the professional – has ‘challenged and changed the coverage of news and politics’ (Highfield 2016, p.82).¹⁷

In this sense, the term ‘new media’, Lievrouw (2011, p.5) argues, has become ‘something of a cultural placeholder’ which encapsulates a host of intended definitions. Indeed, Deuze (2006, p.67) argues that the distinction between ‘new’ and ‘old’ media is superfluous ‘as all media are converging into the overall design of the computer’. Instead, he advocates a more holistic understanding of digital culture which hinges on three interrelated and integral processes: participation, remediation, and *bricolage*. Here, participation describes practices of open publishing and collaborative media production online; remediation points to the ways in which ‘old’ media are folded into the ‘new’ and vice versa; whilst bricolage is evident in the use and remixing of separate artifacts and

¹⁷ Indeed, much has been written on the politics of new and social media (e.g. Atton 2002b; Kahn & Kellner 2004; Jenkins 2006; Byrne 2007; Rahimi 2011; Tufekci 2014; Highfield 2016).

ideas to create new insights or meaning (memesis). All three elements can be seen in the media practices of Stormfront users, as I show in Chapter Five.

In the same way that media convergence has muddled the waters of so-called ‘old’ and ‘new’ media, the boundaries of mainstream and alternative media have become blurred (Kenix 2011; Hájek & Carpentier 2015). Kenix (2011, p.163), argues that ‘the media spectrum is converging – not to a finite diminishing point – but rather to an ever-expanding, blurred intermix of media spheres that develop because of one another and not despite the other’s existence.’ Through my engagement with Stormfront, it becomes clear that there is a ‘source promiscuity’ surrounding narrative and counter-narrative construction (see, Adler 2013). This leads users to cobble together stories using all available resources – often citing publications at explicit ideological odds with WNism. For example, much social conflict has come to revolve around inequalities of media power (Couldry & Curran 2003), and the affordances of so-called ‘new’ media have allowed an alternative media to represent a relative threat to hegemonic media practices.

Indeed, Downing (2001, p.v) asserts that alternative media expresses ‘an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities, and perspectives.’ Furthermore, because of their lack of clear hierarchical governing authority, alternative media have some of the character of grassroots organization (Downing 2007). This grassroots counter-hegemonic nature leads Downing to refer, instead, to ‘radical media.’ Importantly, however, Hájek and Carpentier (2015, p.379) argue that the distinction between alternative (or radical) and mainstream media is increasingly lost in ‘the grey area of hybridity’ as each increasingly fold into the other. To account for this, Atton (2002b, p.493) highlights such complexities, arguing for an articulated ‘hegemonic approach’ to alternative-mainstream media relations, which acknowledges that: ‘media

practices may be viewed as moveable; they may articulate to bourgeois (mainstream) values in one instance, but become joined with radical values in another.’ For example, SF members often critically deploy ‘mainstream’ media reports from sources such as Fox News alongside ‘alternative’ media such as WN blogs in the construction of counter-hegemonic discourses. This fickle interrelation and interpenetration of the mainstream and the alternative now leads me on to a discussion of (re)mediation and the spreadable media format of the meme.

Remediation and memesis

Describing remediation, Bolter and Grusin (2000, p.15) argue that ‘no medium today, and certainly no single media event, seems to do its cultural work in isolation from any other media’. They go on to assert that, through absorbing and repurposing other media, ‘the new medium remains dependent on the older one in acknowledged or unacknowledged ways’ (p.47). For Bolter and Grusin, then, ‘*all* mediation is remediation’ (p.55 – emphasis in original). Cupples and Glynn (2014) argue that in the context of disasters – though applicable to all media events – remediation highlights the open-ended nature of such events for those caught up in them. In the context of my thesis, the constant remediation of footage of unarmed black men being shot by police in the USA, combined with other forms of remediation and articulation (see, Fiske 1996), maintains an acute awareness of the plight of African Americans and the open-endedness of racist police violence.

Fiske (1996, p.2) argues that whilst events may happen, ‘ones which are not mediated do not count, or, at least, count only in their immediate locales.’ I wish to

extend this dictum to account for the logics of spreadable media,¹⁸ arguing that events which are not actively remediated count only in their bounded temporal setting. In this sense, the (re)circulation of particular media events through digital spaces such as SF plays an important role in the construction and maintenance of moral panics. Indeed, I argue that in participatory digital culture (see, Jenkins 1992; Wiggins & Bowers 2015), moral panics spread memetically.

Memes – in the sense of internet memes (Shifman 2012; 2013), as opposed to the concept of the genetic meme (Dawkins 1989) – are a key mode of communication in the digital age (see, Shifman 2013; 2014). The transmission of ideas across vast distances has been accelerated by advances in digital media, and a distinctively new creative participatory engagement with circulating discourses, signs, and symbols has emerged (Highfield 2016). According to Knobel and Lanksheare (2007, p.202), '[a]mong internet insiders, 'meme' is a popular term for describing the rapid uptake and spread of a particular idea presented as a written text, image, language 'move,' or some other unit of cultural 'stuff.'" Importantly, though, as Shifman (2013, p.4 emphasis in original) argues, 'like many web 2.0 applications, memes diffuse from person to person, but shape and reflect general social mindsets [...] in this environment, user-driven imitation and remixing are not just prevalent practices: they have become highly valued pillars of a so-called *participatory culture*'.

Whilst Knobel and Lankshear (2007) argue that humour is a core component of successful memes, this does not mean that all memes are merely flippant. This point is

¹⁸ Jenkins *et al* (2013, p.1) argue, above all else, that "if it doesn't spread, it's dead."

well made by Shifman (2013, p.121), when she argues that ‘regardless of their emotional keying, political memes are about making a point – participating in a normative debate about how the world should look and the best way to get there’. Indeed, Tim Highfield (2016, p.48) argues that ‘hashtagery and portmanteaugraphy’ can be important examples of the ritualizing and remixing of politics on social media; and Burgess (2008) draws similar conclusions about the political nature of social media users’ vernacular creativity. However creative and innovative they may be, the creation and circulation of political memes on Stormfront conforms to the logics of ‘spreadable media’ (Jenkins et al. 2013). As Jenkins *et al* (2013, p.199) argue, ‘content spreads [...] when it acts as fodder for conversations that audiences are already having.’ Here it is clear that members circulate memes with a specific ‘imagined audience’ in mind (Marwick & Boyd 2011).

As media converge, the logics of remediation, spreadability, and memesis become the organising principle behind the circulation of ideas and stories (Baker 2014). In this new media ecology, the traditional model of moral panics, as teleological and elite-driven, is disrupted. The proliferation of social media, and the access that this grants to wider and wider audiences has given the objects of moral panics unprecedented levels of agency in the content and direction of moral panic narratives. It is to this that I now turn.

Moral panic 2.0

Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. (Cohen 2011a, p.1)

In the Easter holidays of 1964, minor unrest visited a number of English coastal towns. Cohen (2011a, p.26), a PhD researcher in Clacton at the time, describes it thus: ‘[a] few groups [of Mods and Rockers] started scuffling on the pavements and throwing stones at each other [...] windows were broken, some beach huts were wrecked and one boy fired a starting pistol in the air.’ Following the incidents, the British press (‘over’)reported the story with dramatic license (p.26). The scuffles witnessed first-hand by Cohen became a ‘Day of Terror’ in the hands of the *Daily Telegraph* and an invasion of ‘wild ones’ in the *Daily Mirror*.

The overwrought language - repeated in reports of this incident, and those that followed in Brighton and Margate - conjured images of towns under siege and holiday-makers driven off the beaches and promenades fearing for their lives. Such exaggeration was only apparent to those who had been present to see the beaches already deserted, during the coldest Easter in eighty years, and the ‘holidaymakers’ who had actually turned out to watch the Mods and Rockers. However, as Cohen asserts: ‘[once] a dominant perception is established the tendency is to assimilate all subsequent happenings to it [...] through the process of sensitization, incidents which would not

[normally be] defined as unusual or worthy of attention [acquire] new meaning' (p.173). Soon incidents which would usually pass without comment were being articulated into circulating discourses of youth criminality and violence, and banal cues and signs, such as clothing or vocabulary became significant symbols. The 'moral barricades' were manned by 'right-thinking people' (p.1), and Members of Parliament called for stronger punitive measures against 'hooliganism' and other youth offenses. As Cohen analysed this unfolding case, the moral panic concept was born. In the decades since Cohen's seminal work was published, the global mediaspace has become so densely inter-connected that media saturate everyday life with an intensity never seen before (Couldry 2008). In tracing the genealogy and trajectory of the concept, Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2013, p.33) argue that '[moral panic] remains, today, an idea whose utility has proven timeless'. Whilst it is clear that there remains significant explanatory value in the original concept, it is also apparent that it requires some updating if it is to continue to provide insight in and for a digital age.

The particular value of the moral panic concept, according to David et al (2011), lies in its focus on the behaviour of the labellers rather than the deficiencies of the labelled. Indeed Cohen (2011a, p.16) makes this explicit himself when he states that he will be 'paying less attention to the actors than to the audience'. It is clear that this approach has much potential in opening up important and progressive discussions surrounding the power to define social situations. However, it has also led, in some cases, to avoidance of the question of the so-called folk devils' agency (see de Young 2013). Asserting this point, Kevin Glynn (2015, p.308) highlights the agency of counter-hegemonic actors in the convergent mediascape:

The relatively socially weak forces and voices, in turn, radiate outwards toward the networked margins, which provide a kind of safe harbor of enclaves and opportunities for growth and development through processes associated with convergence cultures [...] such as collective intelligence and creative remix, which are increasingly important to the production of counterdiscourses and counterknowledges, to the practices of rearticulation and resignification, and to the generation of oppositional identities and the maintenance or protection of endangered solidarities.

In chapter six, I argue for attention to the agency of so-called ‘folk devils’ to partially ‘manage’ moral panics in the digital age, through exploiting new and social media platforms. Here I draw together the literatures of activist social media, structures of feeling, and affect. What hopefully emerges, is a new way of understanding the mechanics of the moral panic and the agency of increasingly ‘feisty folk devils’ (Cricher 2006, p.252).

To illustrate this, I now briefly present a revisionist-fantasy account of the Easter unrest in 1964 to imagine how Cohen’s case-study might have been different had it taken place in the multi-mediated and convergent age of ‘news now’ (Sheller 2014) and ‘spreadable media’ (Jenkins et al. 2013).

Clacton revisited

It had been a particularly cold and grey Easter break. The beaches of Clacton, Margate, and Brighton were deserted - save for the intrepid dog-walkers who had little choice but to brave the elements. The annual exodus of working class holidaymakers from East London had been curtailed by the prospect of a shivering weekend of soggy chips on the promenade and falling out over weather-bound games of Monopoly. Many of those who *had* made the journey were restless young Mods and Rockers, looking to escape the drudgery of their day-to-day routine in the city. Few had turned up to cause trouble, though that's how it would be reported.

The Saturday morning was damp, and tensions had grown throughout the previous night over a rumour that some bars had refused service to 'out-of-towners'. By the early afternoon, palpable frustrations had boiled over and a few groups began scuffling on the pavements and throwing

stones at each other. The boundary lines between the two subcultural groups ossified, and Mods faced off against Rockers. Shortly after the first fights broke out, local police turned up to dissipate the rapidly gathering crowds and bring the disturbance under control. Instead, the underprepared and undermanned police force served to exacerbate the situation. Over the rest of the weekend the fights continued, those on scooters roared up and down the street, a small number of windows were broken, and a few beach huts were wrecked. The atmosphere was tense and oppressive.

On Saturday evening, the *BBC* website ran a *breaking news* story describing 'scenes of chaos' and 'widespread violence', and The *Daily Mail's* online edition led with 'Wild Youth Invade Seaside', publishing photographs of snarling and bloodied Mods and Rockers, and painting a picture of fleeing tourists. The reports were overblown, and relied on 'witness' accounts,

pictures, and videos, rather than first-hand journalism.

Over the weekend, Twitter lit up with debate and #clactonriots started trending. The tenor was mixed. Whilst panic abounded as some users speculated over where might ‘erupt’ next, others saw through manipulative media accounts, presenting a more nuanced analysis and questioning the use of the term ‘riot’. The most vocal users over this period were those being demonised. Both Mods and Rockers were active throughout the weekend. Some, out of teenage bravado, fanned the flames, goading the other side and posturing for the assembled press and public. Many more, however, used social media to give their side of the story, and challenge circulating narratives which cast them as violent animals.

Challenging the disproportionality of mainstream coverage, social media users in Clacton posted videos subverting #clactonriots. The videos used the hashtag

ironically, documenting banal events in an attempt to undermine mainstream hyperbole: in one, a bin blows over in a bitter gust of March wind (#clactonriots); in another, two elderly women share an umbrella, as they battle through the rain (#clactonriots); in yet another, a seagull swaggers back and forth on the roof of a parked car (#clactonriots). A similar tactic juxtaposes quotes from mainstream media – such as ‘scooter gangs terrorise seafront’ – with the deserted windswept vistas photographed first-hand and the hashtags #movealongnow, #nothingtoseehere, and #quietnoriot. Building on this theme, a photograph was circulated showing a Mod and a Rocker in a warm embrace in front of a line of police in riot gear with the hashtags #clactonriots and #dontbelievethethehype. Another meme showed a police officer wielding a baton and charging a group of frightened young girls in Rocker gear. The caption read ‘I don’t always beat little girls, but when I do, they’re defenceless’, articulating the violence of the police in

Clacton with wider concerns about police brutality. These memes, and the stories behind them, were quickly remediated in the more liberal press, leading to debate criticizing police tactics. Whilst discourses of violent riots and out-of-control youth were prominent, they were not uncontested.

Within a few days, media interest had subsided, and, when the arrested youths were freed on the following Wednesday, no outlet carried more than a few lines. It was hard to tell whether the *ad hoc* campaign by, and on behalf of, the Mods and Rockers had been successful in challenging their demonization. Time would tell.

Social media and the (re)producerly text

Whilst this is clearly an exercise in fiction, it closely resembles the development of similar moral panics – for example, the reaction to protests in Ferguson following the shooting of Michael Brown. The moral panics of the 1960s and 70s were assumed by scholars to develop unilaterally – emanating from mainstream media and elites for relatively uncritical digestion by the mass media consumer. In little more than a decade, there has been a clear process of citizen engagement in politics as social media has grown in popularity and functionality (see, Kahn & Kellner 2004; Lievrouw 2006; Almgren & Olsson 2015). The affordances of social media have also allowed networks of political solidarity to grow by connecting ideologically-similar actors translocally (see, Gerbaudo 2012; Castells 2013; Croeser & Highfield 2015). This emergent media practice has produced latent critical collectives which are able to mobilise quickly in order to contest a given narrative (see, Papacharissi 2014; McCosker 2015).

Facilitating such contestation, has given counter-hegemonic actors – progressive *and* reactionary – increased access to mass audiences (Kahn & Kellner 2004). As well as lay analysis, practices of ‘citizen witnessing’ – such as the amateur videos in my fictionalized account above – have produced what Smit, Heinrich, and Broersma (2015, p.15) argue is a ‘new memory ecology’. Through representing a seemingly unadulterated ‘reality’, citizen actors can influence public debate and contribute to the construction of future memories. Introducing a useful turn of phrase, Shani Orgad (2012) develops a theory of the ‘global imagination’ as a way of exploring contested constructions of the world, self, and other. Whilst I am convinced that imagination and memory are central to life online – in the same way that they are essential to the cohesion of a nation (see, Anderson 2006) – it is important, I believe, to understand that these are sectional and partial. The majority of Stormfront discussion and media-sharing influence remains internal,

for example. However, I will show in Chapter Five that during media events, there are moments where such sectional processes are remediated and articulated into broader debates.

As a result, there has been a clear proliferation in the number of agents of circulation involved in the (re)production and movement of the moral panic. Where panics of the past represented what Fiske (1996) describes as producerly texts – where meaning is co-produced by author and reader – I argue in chapter five that contemporary panics are better understood as *(re)producerly* texts. By this, I mean that the meaning *and* the content and direction of moral panics are memetically open to contestation and transformation. In this way, access to social media and the convergent mediascape has changed the way that moral panics are (re)produced and (re)circulated.

Whilst most ‘successful’ panics still seem to find their genesis in mainstream media, they no longer enjoy the authority they may have once exerted. The reach of moral panics has been extended into the banal everyday spaces of social media, whilst the agency behind their circulation has been dispersed. The primary divergence between the fictional account above and the events originally described by Cohen, lies in the availability and use of computer mediated communication and social media to mobilise what Anthony McCosker (2015, p.4) describes as ‘emergent affective publics’. In open, dense media environments, he argues, ‘affect [...] becomes the key organizing factor in the generation of attention’. Although McCosker may be said to overstate the novelty of affect’s importance in ‘new’ media (as opposed to ‘old’ media), he argues elsewhere (McCosker & Johns 2014) that agonistic micropublics may develop around media-events, producing opportunities to engage in debate and extend cultural citizenship. Indeed, the potential for racialized identities to be reappropriated and performed online – through social aggregations such as ‘black twitter’ (see, Florini 2013; Sharma 2013) – shows how dominant

representations can be challenged.¹⁹ It is this potential for deeper and more participatory engagement with circulating media events which fundamentally changes the mechanics of the moral panic. Furthermore, the *moral nature* of moral panics is called into question once power over circulating discourses is decentralized.

In ‘revisiting and revamping’ the moral panic – and writing before the rapid proliferation of such technologies – Angela McRobbie and Sarah Thornton (1995) highlight the contested nature of moral panics in multimediated societies. They argue that relatively autonomous alternative media exert their own power to counter the ‘loud voices of moral guardians’ (p.212). Arguing for more diffused agency, de Young (1998; 2013) draws attention to folk devils as subjects, rather than objects, of moral panic, and analyses their mobilisation of social capital as a defence. Both McRobbie and Thornton, and de Young’s work comes early in the development of new media, but already speaks to the shifting nature of moral panics.

As social media has proliferated and progressed, moral panics have become more diffuse and contested. The empirical material presented in this thesis supports Silverstone’s (2007) assertion that boundary work, carried out by media, has become more complex, with the loci of cultural and political activity increasingly spreading to the margins. Whilst Cohen originally argued that moral panics progressed in a relatively top-down manner, in his introduction to the third edition of *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (Cohen 2011a), he concedes that the mediascape has diversified and pluralised since he first wrote the book. What’s more, he argues elsewhere that ‘[whilst] traditional moral panics are elite engineered [...] new panics [...] give more space to

¹⁹ However, it is important to realise that there is no monolithic black or white online public (see, Brock 2012; Senft & Noble 2014).

social movements, identity politics and victims' (2011b, p.241). Cohen is not explicit here about what sort of space is opened up, and it is this, in part, which I explore in this thesis.

Thinking race: race-thinking

This is emphatically not a review of race and racism theory – it is not even a review of such thinking in the discipline of geography. This work has been done very ably by a number of key thinkers (Bonnett 1996; Kobayashi & Peake 1994; Bressey & Dwyer 2008; Nayak 2011; Meer & Nayak 2013). I have found myself trying to determine the most useful way of talking about race and racism whilst avoiding theoretical territorialism. In this section, then, I hope to show the epistemological flexibility which informs my work and set my arguments in the context of the literatures which inform them. I take my inspiration from Hall (cited in Mills 2007, p.141), when he argues: 'I use theory in strategic ways. I am not afraid to borrow this idea and try to match it up with this idea borrowed from another paradigm.' Indeed, Massumi (in, Deleuze & Guattari 2013, p.xi) argues that concepts have no inherent use without action: '[a] concept is a brick. It can be used to build the courthouse of reason. Or it can be thrown through the window.' Throughout this review, and thesis, I aim to begin opening fertile lines of intersection.

To do so, I build on the foundations laid by cultural studies and cultural geography (Williams 1977; Grossberg 1996; Harding & Pribram 2004; Mills 2007; Swanton 2010b; Anderson 2014; Ioanide 2015) to bring together thinking on 'structure' and 'affect' in understanding race. Specifically, I show my development from understanding race as structure, through flirtations with affect, to a more nuanced appreciation of the interplay of the processes of representation with the more-than-representational (see, Lorimer 2005).

I have struggled, at times, to resolve the tensions between these approaches. Where I have found myself frustrated by the lack of an explicit anti-racist politics in affective approaches to racism (Saldanha 2006; Saldanha & Adams 2012), I have turned to structural and systemic theories. Conversely, where I have come up against structure-bound ignorance of agency and lived experience (Omi & Winant 1994; Feagin 2006), I have sought to bring these back in by pulling focus through an affective lens. There are also moments where the two have come together in productive ways, around ‘structures of feeling’ (Williams 1977; Grossberg 1996; Harding & Pribram 2004; Anderson 2014) and affective orientations to the state and state-sanctioned violence (Mbembe 2003; Ahmed 2004a; Butler 2006). Beyond intellectual autobiography, then, I want to argue for creative tension, rather than resolution. Indeed, I deploy each strategically in different contexts, whilst avoiding problematic binary interpretations.

To achieve this in such limited space, I explore a single story – the shooting of Michael Brown by Officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, MO. in 2014²⁰ – before coming back to the online context. I often find myself frustrated with the abstract nature of theorizing on race and racism (Omi & Winant 1994; Goldberg 2004; Feagin 2006; Saldanha 2006).²¹ In my view, the best work on race and racism situates theoretical analysis of the phenomena in real lived experiences (e.g. Hall et al. 1978; Ahmed 1999; Ahmed 2004b; Swanton 2010a; Fields & Fields 2012; Kilomba 2013; Coates 2015; Ioanide 2015; Taylor 2016). Framing my discussion around Michael Brown’s murder allows me to ground the theoretical debates I present in the violent lived reality of racism. Furthermore, this violent event, and the reactions it provoked, are a useful

²⁰ In later chapters, I apply the literature and approaches discussed here to Stormfront and its place in wider discursive circuits.

²¹ See Gilmore (2002) and Kilomba (2013) on the violence of abstraction.

lens for thinking through different scales of analysis and the points at which predominantly affective or structural accounts become useful.

In sketching the trajectory of my own thinking on race, I first think through the incident, and reaction to it, by drawing on predominantly structural forms of analysis. In this section, I explore the ‘fatal coupling of power and difference’ (Gilmore 2002) which killed Brown; the ‘white racial grammar’ (Bonilla-Silva 2012) which provided justification; and ‘the ‘machineries’ and regimes of representation’ (Hall 1996) which framed the ensuing protest movement. I then explore the same events through an affective lens. Here, I find that ‘sticky signs’ (Ahmed 2004b) and ‘affective modulation’ (Massumi 2005) produce ‘collective feelings’ (Ahmed 2004a) and shared orientations toward ‘the other’ (Ahmed 2006). Finally, I explore the ways in which ‘structures of feeling’ (Williams 1977; Anderson 2014) can be seen to express collective moods *and* representational mechanisms and schema. In particular, I consider the contemporary conjunctural dynamics of racism and the ‘politics of feeling [which produce] an articulated plane of affect’ (Grossberg 1996, p.168). In doing so, I examine how collective affects are patterned, drawing on Anderson’s (2014, p.113) attention to the ‘unmalleable aspects of feeling [which] can be social or cultural’ and their role in structuring what can be felt. By way of conclusion, I come back to the digital context with a brief discussion of how these approaches relate to race online.

Structures of racism

Over the past few decades, socially constructed nature of race has become something of an axiom in social science (see, Jackson & Penrose 1994; Omi & Winant 1994; Gilroy 1998; Bell 2000; Gilroy 2012; hooks 2013). This development, away from the scientific racism of ‘color, hair and bone’ (Du Bois in Rabaka 2007, p.45), has prompted a number of contrasting epistemological (and) political approaches to the ontology of race. A particularly influential line

of reasoning asserts that, since race is a social construct, it cannot be a legitimate category of analysis (Miles 1984; Gilroy 1998; Ware & Back 2002; Nayak 2006; Ashe & McGeever 2011). Furthermore, by using and discussing the concept, it is argued that academics may lend legitimacy to the fallacy of race, '[becoming] part of the 'race' problem' (Gilroy 2002, p.150). However, in the introduction to *Colorblind Racism*, Bonilla-Silva (2006, p.8) notes that this anti-foundational approach has, perhaps tellingly, '[gained] popularity among white social scientists'. The assumption that race can be dispensed with, perhaps comes, in part, as a consequence of the invisibility of whiteness (Dyer 1997) and the 'invisible knapsack' of resources and privileges this confers (McIntosh 1990).

Whilst there is a clear and admirable political agenda in this anti-foundationalist (Nayak 2006, p.423) project, there is a discomfort with the parenthesising 'erasure' of race²² (Meer 2014). As Michael Brown lay dead in the street, a victim of racialized structural inequalities, the very real lived experience of race was hard to deny.²³ Indeed, as hooks (2013, pp.184–5) evocatively writes: '[home] is the only place where there is no race [... as] soon as I walk out the door, race is waiting, like a watchful stalker ready to grab me and keep me in place ready to remind me that slavery is not just in the past but here right now ready to entrap, to hold and bind.'

In other words, and, as Bonilla-Silva (2006) re-asserts, despite the biological fallacy of race, it has nonetheless very real effects in the world. Indeed, he uses the term 'racial structure' to

²² Often written as 'race' – complete with 'scare-quotes' to denote the constructed and problematic nature of the idea.

²³ This disconnect between theory and experience is captured by David Roediger (1994) who recounts a common joke told by black colleagues which juxtaposes their academic analyses of race as a social construct against their continued difficulties in flagging a taxi at night.

describe the ‘totality of the social relations and practices that reinforce white privilege’ (p.9).²⁴

The racialized discourses which emerged in much media coverage of Michael Brown’s killing and the protests that followed are a stark example of such ‘real world’ effects (e.g. Barrabi 2014; Eligon 2014). This incident is one among countless others in what Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015, p.98) describes as ‘the long war against the black body’. Importantly, though, as Hall (1997) argues, race is a ‘floating signifier’ – in that it has no fixed point of reference – and its construction is conjuncturally and contextually specific (see also, Ignatiev 1995).

Contemporary anti-black racism in the USA is intimately linked to the state’s history of slavery and racial/colonial oppression (Grosfoguel 1999; Gilmore 2002; McKittrick 2011; Wolfe 2016). Racism cannot be separated from the structures which (re)produce and sustain it. When Darren Wilson, a white police officer, shot and killed an unarmed black teenager, he ‘[enforced] the whims of [the American state], correctly interpreting its heritage and legacy’ (Coates 2015, p.10).²⁵ When Wilson was granted his freedom, with no indictment or trial, he enjoyed the structural advantages of the white supremacist state (see, Hooks 1994; Bonilla-Silva 1997; Gilmore 2002).²⁶

²⁴ Importantly, bell hooks (2000, p.161) consistently refers to ‘white supremacist capitalist patriarchy’ to make clear that racism is also always classed and gendered.

²⁵ Wolfe (2016, p.3) powerfully locates the founding of the USA in the racism of accumulation by dispossession: ‘As John Locke provided, in texts that would profoundly influence Euroamerican colonial ideology, private property accrued from the admixture of labour and land. As this formula was colour-coded on the colonial ground, Blacks provided the former and Indians the latter, the application of Black people’s labour to Red peoples land producing the White man’s property.’

²⁶ In the next section, I show how such structures (re)produce dispositions such as fear, hate, disgust, and so on. For example, the ‘history of articulation’ (Ahmed 2004b, p.92) of black men with criminality and violence shapes the affective contours of encounters between them and police.

Michael Brown was killed by what Gilmore (2002, p.16) describes as the ‘fatal coupling of power and difference’. In this sense, Darren Wilson’s state-sanctioned violence served to reproduce political power whilst naturalising difference through the violent abstraction of Brown’s body into the overdetermined enemy. Here, the pervasiveness of a white ruling racial grammar (Bonilla-Silva 2012) serves to expedite the framing of Brown as a ‘thug’, implicitly justifying Wilson’s lethal actions. Even in accounts of Brown’s death which highlighted his gentle nature or his academic future, a ‘state of absolute Otherness [sic] in relation to the *white* subject’ was nonetheless apparent in the exceptionalism implied – he could simply have been a *good* black man (see, hooks 2013 on this).

Hall’s (1980, p.341) assertion that ‘race is [...] the modality in which class is ‘lived’, the medium through which class relations are experienced’ is pertinent here (Virdee 2014). Indeed, as McKittrick (2011, p.952) argues, ‘place annihilation [...] brings into sharp focus how violence functions to render specific human lives, and thus their communities, as waste’. The working class black neighbourhood in which Brown lived, and died, like so many others, has been subject to what McKittrick (2011) describes as ‘black urbicide’ – the razing or deliberate terminal neglect of black urban spaces. This process of erasure, Gilmore (2007, p.28) argues, has the effect of normalizing and naturalising the ‘premature death’ of the racialized other. Ezekiel (2002, p.66) sums up the insidious nature of racism thus:

If I grow up living next to a cement factory and inhale cement dust every day, cement dust becomes a part of my body. If I am White and grow up in a society in which race matters, I inhale racism, and racism becomes part of my mind and spirit. [...] This is not to say that those must remain the dominant parts of my mind and spirit. It is to say that it is mistaken to presume that I have no traces of racism in me.

As Price (2010) asserts, there is no ‘outside’ to racialized geographies, and it is in this context that Darren Wilson, almost inevitably, raises his weapon and fires, bringing Brown’s life to a premature conclusion and thereby reproducing racialized political power (Gilmore 2002).

Here, Brown's death is articulated into a complex unity of racialized contexts which are so clearly structured in white dominance (Hall 1980).²⁷ For example, Ferguson is two-thirds black (Lowery et al. 2014), a fact which highlights what hooks (2000, p.132) describes as 'racial apartheid [...] maintained and institutionalized by a white dominated real estate market'. Furthermore, whilst 67% of the Ferguson population is black, 94% of the police force (50 out of 53 officers) is white (Swaine 2014). The remainders of plantation racism, then, cast officer Wilson in the role of oppressive overseer, over-patrolling black neighbourhoods in the name of so-called 'quality of [white] life' policing (Brown 2004). This brand of militarized policing has become the norm in times of crisis (Hall-Blanco & Coyne 2012; Inwood & Bonds 2016), killing black men with an alarming regularity. In addition, many of those who survive such encounters with police are fed into to an increasingly racist prison industrial complex (Gilmore 2007). As Feagin (2010a, p.x) argues: '[in] the United States, racist thought, emotion, and action are structured into the rhythms of everyday life. They are lived, concrete, advantageous for whites, and painful for those who are not white. Each major part of the life of a white person or a person of color is shaped directly or indirectly by this country's systemic racism.'

It is clear that established histories and structures of racism and settler colonialism (Inwood & Bonds 2016) underpin the confrontation between Brown and Wilson – and yet, post-civil-rights 'colour blindness' operates (with some success) to deracinate the victim through a discursive flattening out of racial differences (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich 2012; Goldberg 2016). In this context, white privilege acts to suppress the clearly racialized nature of the encounter in ways which would be unlikely had the roles been reversed (McIntosh 1990; Brunsma 2011).

²⁷ As Gilmore (2002, p.20) pointedly reminds us, 'the U.S. was conceived in slavery [...] and christened by genocide.'

It is clear, therefore, that awareness of the structural roots of racism is essential in situating Brown's death within a broader conjunctural politics. The warnings of Gramsci, refracted through Hall (1980), that racism should not be analysed outside of its specific context of articulation, are instructive here. Importantly, attention to the structuring of racism allows for an approach to antiracism that avoids psychologising and individualising its effects and brings agency and structure into creative tension. Reductive structural analyses in isolation do not sufficiently describe or explain the lived experience of race and racism as aversive, hateful, fearful, disgusting, and so on. For this reason, I now turn to an affective reading of Michael Brown's killing, to try to understand the work that race does in everyday encounters and relationships.

Racist affects

As I worked on Chapter Six – 'Repertoires of race and WN morality' – I read Ta-Nehisi Coates' (2015) book *Between the World and Me*. Written as an autobiographical letter to his son, Coates warns of the struggles faced by black men growing up in the USA, and the systemic nature of repressive racist violence. So much of his narrative painfully highlights the affective and everyday experience of race and racism:

All our phrasing – race relations, racial chasm, racial justice, white privilege, even white supremacy – serves to obscure that racism is a visceral experience, that it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth [...] the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body [...] when I was young] the only people I knew were black, and all of them were powerfully, adamantly, dangerously afraid.

(Coates 2015, pp.10–14)

Until reading Coates, I had thought of race primarily in terms of structure and power, but his memoir stuck with me, pushing me to think more about the affective experience of racism.

To think this through further, I want to bring the fatal meeting of Officer Darren Wilson and Michael Brown back into view. Following Swanton (2010a, p.461), the contact zone of the road sorts bodies through ‘rapid judgements that mediate encounters, align bodies, infuse dispositions, and incite actions’. In this context, affective economies of fear and anxiety infuse Wilson’s disposition towards Brown and incite his violent action. As Ioanide (2015, p.38) puts it: ‘The more that the narrow associative repetition between criminality and impoverished Black and Latino/a people in cities circulated in the post-civil rights era, the more the dominant reflexive and automatic affective economies of fear and anxiety mistook their bodies (not their acts) as criminal.’ In describing the killing of a black friend at the hands of police, Coates (2015, p.78) remarks: ‘[he] was not killed by a single officer so much as he was murdered by his country and all the fears that have marked it from birth’. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the same fears about blackness, criminality, miscegenation, impurity, and so on, bubble up in the Wilson/Brown encounter. Here, race acts as a technology which ‘sorts’ bodies through encounter (Swanton 2010b).

Swanton (2010a, p.461), developing Bennett’s (2004) important work, argues for a ‘vital materialism’ which acknowledges and examines ‘the force of things’. Indeed, in this ‘event of race’ the assemblage of Wilson’s police SUV, his police uniform, his standard issue pistol, the radio call about black males and robbery, Brown’s flip flops, white t-shirt, baggy long shorts, red baseball cap, walking in the middle of the carriageway, the majority black neighbourhood, past encounters, and so on - all combine to produce judgements and actions. Tying this assemblage together and giving it lethal power is the ‘quality of life policing’ (Brown 2004) which preserves white middle class quality of life, and acts as a form of ‘affective modulation’ (Massumi 2005,

p.32), impelling officers to action, and justifying oppressive strategies to the wider (white) public.²⁸

As Butler (1997, p.33) asserts, even in resistance, bodies are interpellated into dominant modes of representation, '[delineating] the space [they] occupy [... constructing] a social positionality [...] the mark interpellation makes is not descriptive, but inaugurative. It seeks to introduce a reality rather than report on an existing one'. In the case of Michael Brown, Wilson's hail interpellates the black teen into racialized subjecthood²⁹ at which point societal fears and disgust provoke an affective response of distancing (see, Ahmed 2004b) – here manifest in Brown's fatal wounding. In this way, such racializing orientations serve to produce race, in as much as they 'shape what bodies 'can do'' (Ahmed 2006, p.112).

Post-structural accounts such as these offer important insights into the 'event' of race. Something so intimately linked to feelings of fear, hate, disgust, pain, and humiliation cannot be understood without acknowledging the agency of actors, their pre-cognitive dispositions, and the vitality of material objects. In this affective account of Wilson and Brown's lethal encounter, however, I often find myself frustrated by a lack of attention to the ways in which affects express, or are triggered by, structural relations of power. The modulation of affect, for example, takes place within structural frameworks, and toward particular political ends (see, Connolly 2011). Furthermore, the context under which the two met was precipitated by structural inequalities – the majority white police and the majority black neighbourhood, for example. As Butler (2009, p.50) argues:

²⁸ See Ioanide (2015) on the supremacy of feelings over facts in the current so-called 'colour-blind' era.

²⁹ During questioning, Wilson described Brown as being like the wrestler 'Hulk Hogan' and a 'demon'. Here, the 'animation' of the black body serves as an 'affective spectacle' aligning Brown with the 'historically tenacious construction of racialized subjects as excessively emotional, bodily subjects' (Ngai 2005, p.125).

Our affect is never merely our own: affect is, from the start, communicated from elsewhere. It disposes us to perceive the world in a certain way, to let certain dimensions of the world in and to resist others [...] Affect depends upon social supports for feeling: we come to feel only in relation to a perceivable loss, one that depends on social structures of perception; and we can only feel and claim affect as our own on the condition that we have already been inscribed in a circuit of social affect.

It is in this context that cultural studies and cultural geography bring affect and structure into creative tension.

Structures of feeling

In this final section, I briefly show how bringing together affective and structural modes of analysis is essential to an anti-racist politics which acknowledges the systemic nature of racism-as-power, whilst locating racist practices and the ‘doing’ of race in the everyday. To demonstrate this, I think through reaction to the shooting of Brown, drawing on two key frameworks – necropolitics (Mbembe 2003) and grievability (Butler 2006; Butler 2009) – which intersect with structures of feeling, usefully bringing structure and affect into epistemological dialogue around processes of racialization.

In *Marxism and Literature*, Williams (1977, p.132) outlines ‘Structures of feeling’ as ‘practical consciousness of a present kind [...] meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt.’ Importantly, as Williams points out, these are always in a state of emergence through characteristics of ‘impulse, restraint, and tone’ (p.132). Furthermore, Williams advocates going beyond hegemonic accounts, introducing the potential for structures of feeling to diverge from official discourses. Indeed, Flatley’s (2008, p.27) use of the concept asserts that ‘depression is a mood, not a structure of feeling; however, we might describe the particular depression of the Russian peasant in the steppe in the 1920s as a structure of feeling, or the depression of the

residents of a decimated New Orleans after Katrina as a structure of feeling. Or [...] we might talk about the structures of feeling created by the civil rights movement and the Black Panthers.’

Far from homogenous and universal, then, structures of feeling are sectional and geographically specific (Urry 1981; Evans et al. 2002).³⁰ Indeed, Lauren Berlant (2015, p.194) highlights their contingency:

[structures of feeling] might organize lifeworld activity into social forms that constitute more and less formal, more and less labile infrastructures of collective life within the present as a faceted space of world-making. Social antagonisms that represent genuinely clashing interests and ambitions are always part of what shapes the ordinary, but the way in which they saturate, structure, and destructure its dynamics changes over time and varies over locale. The nation form, capitalism, biopolitical normativities, all of these forces hold up worlds but not identically, in the same way, or with homogeneous relations to history or local practices.

For example, the sedimented experience of encounters with police is very different in majority black neighbourhoods than it is in majority white ones. As Angela Davis (2004 [1971]) asserts: ‘The announced function of the police, ‘to protect and serve the people,’ becomes the grotesque caricature of protecting and preserving the interests of our [African Americans] oppressors and serving us nothing but injustice.’ It is this black working-class structure of feeling demonstrated by Coates (2015, p.126) when he talks of his eyes ‘made in Baltimore [and] blindfolded by fear’, and it is this structure of feeling, in part, I would argue, that partly at least informed Michael Brown’s actions. Franz Fanon’s (cited in Ahmed 2006, p.101) experience of finding his actions constrained and oriented by overdetermination is pertinent here: ‘Below the corporeal schema I had sketched out a historic-racial schema. The elements that I used had been provided for me not by residual sensations and perceptions primarily of a tactile, vestibular, kinaesthetic, and

³⁰ Indeed, Nelson and Dunn (2016) argue that whilst racism is everywhere, it is everywhere different, and this demands localized anti-racist responses.

visual character, but by the other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories.’ It could be argued that the weight of decades of systemic racist policing in the US has produced a ‘practical consciousness’ which affectively orientates young black men confrontationally towards (and away from) police and the state through fear and anger (see, Maclin 1992).

Even in the current so-called post-racial era (Lentin 2012; Goldberg 2016), US American racecraft³¹ succeeds in producing anti-black structures of feeling (Fields & Fields 2012). Indeed, Fields and Fields (2012, p.10) argue that ‘post-racial turns out to be –simply– racial; which is to say, racist.’ As I have sought to show, racism is intimately linked to structures of feeling, which flow as undercurrents until moments of rupture when they rush to the surface influencing responses to media events (see, Fiske 1996).³² In the case of Michael Brown, the conjunctural ‘logics’ of post-racality (Goldberg 2016) combine with a pervasive anti-black structure of feeling to legitimize the lethal response. Furthermore, as is shown in the case of Darren Wilson, racism-as-structure is ‘rendered invisible’ (Goldberg 2014, p.174) through a neo-individualizing tendency – the return of MacPherson’s (1999) ‘bad apple’. Indeed, as Goldberg (2014, p.206) argues, ‘structural racism is buried, alive, beneath the veil of private racist expression, innuendo, and implication.’

Here, a contradictory tension exists within the state where a necropolitical regime³³ categorises Brown’s black body as disposable (Mbembe 2003) at the same time as it declares

³¹ Fields and Fields (2012, pp.5–6) coin the term racecraft to draw a parallel between the illogical belief in witchcraft and the workings of race: ‘[the] term highlights the ability of pre- or non-scientific modes of thought to hijack the minds of the scientifically literate.’

³² See, for example, Garza (2016) and Taylor (2016) on the explosion of the Black Lives Matter movement.

³³ Necropolitics, according to Mbembe (2003, p.39) is the ‘subjugation of life to the power of death’.

racism obsolete (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Coates 2008). I argue in Chapter Six that through this necropolitical imperative, the state remains arbiter of vital value – even in the notionally counter-hegemonic politics of Stormfront.

Here, I think two factors are important to an understanding of processes of racialization following violent media-events. First, as Gramsci (1971, p.178) argues, ‘it is upon [the terrain of the conjunctural] that forces of opposition organize.’ This means that – even whilst the ‘post-racial’ is shown to be a myth – racist violence by non-state actors must be condemned by white nationalists to avoid further stigma and proscription. On the other hand, state (or state-sanctioned) violence can be celebrated since a necropolitical instrumental rationality sanitizes the act. At the same time, the mediated display of bodies serves to ‘[democratize] the means of disposing of the enemies of the state’ in a similar way to the procession of severed body parts during the French Revolution (Mbembe 2003, p.19). Affective intensities of fear, disgust, and morbid pleasure (see, Ahmed 2004b; Ngai 2005; Anderson 2014) combine with racist structures of policing (see, Hall et al. 1978; Brown 2004) and ‘race relations’ (Miles 1993) to produce a contingent form of racialization. In Chapter Six I outline this process, arguing that, following episodes of racist violence, racialized bodies emerge and are sorted into *abstract* and *concrete* ‘others’.

The classic white nationalist construct of the abstract and monstrous abject other (see, Tyler 2013) – the uncontrollably libidinous or genetically criminal black, for example – is apprehended as the object of necropolitical power. Thus, Butler (2009, p.31) argues: ‘such populations are ‘lose-able’ [...] they are cast as threats to human life as we know it rather than as living populations in need of protection [...] they are ‘ungrievable’.’ Whilst Michael Brown’s death became a *cause célèbre* for anti-racist campaigners under the banner of #blacklivesmatter, his

body was incorporated into a discourse of criminality and state control which postulated that black lives matter less, and some don't matter at all.

I show later that for white nationalists, the involvement of the state legitimized the violence, and therefore the designation of Brown as one of the 'bad black people', not the 'good' ones (hooks 2013, p.11). In the case of Dylann Roof's attack on an African American church in Charleston, the lack of state involvement or sanction as well as the target (the 'good black people'), produced an altogether different affective response among white nationalists – sadness and grief. However, the grievable black body emerged as an anomaly – set against the grotesque stereotypes more commonly circulated.

This section has been consciously grounded in the story of Michael Brown to avoid the abstract theorizing which I argue characterizes much academic work on race (Omi & Winant 1994; Goldberg 2004; Feagin 2006; Saldanha 2006). By tracing the trajectory of my own thinking on race, I highlight my efforts to avoid reifying a problematic structure/affect dichotomy. At the same time, however, I argue that the tension between structure and affect need not necessarily be resolved since each approach is useful in different, but interlinked, contexts. In the next section, I turn to the geographies of the digital, starting with a discussion of how race circulates online in spaces such as SF.

Geographies of the digital

Race, racism and community online

Racist groups' use of the internet is well documented: it includes the use of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as less dialogical and more static forms such as blogs and websites to share media, discuss ideas and organise action (Back et al. 1998;

Back 2002a; Sutton 2002; Bowman-Grieve 2009; Sutton & Wright 2009; Caiani & Parenti 2009). Back, Keith and Solomos (1998, p.98) argue that the internet's intimacy and remoteness: 'make it uniquely suitable for maintaining relationships among groups that are prone to attrition, because forms of association can be established at a social and geographical distance'. This mixture of intimacy and remoteness, it seems, allows for experimental engagement with the ideas of the far-right. SF becomes a 'meeting place' of sorts, where prospective members are able to 'dip their toe' into the murky waters of live web chat and white supremacist propaganda without ever revealing their 'real' identity or making any commitment.³⁴

Amongst some of the first groups to venture onto the World Wide Web in the 1990s were extreme right-wing organisations using the web to disseminate hate literature and 'news' (Back 2002a; Daniels 2009b; Simi & Futrell 2010). As computer mediated communications (CMC) became more sophisticated, these groups began to adapt their original broadcast format to incorporate more and more interactive features such as forum message boards and media sharing (Daniels 2009b). Indeed, Simi and Futrell (2010, p.83 - emphasis added) go so far as to argue that 'the survival and growth of the white power movement *depends on the internet* [where] online forums are echo chambers for hate'. More than just echo chambers, Daniels (2009b, p.3) asserts that 'the Internet is an increasingly important front on [sic] the political struggle to contest the meanings of race, racism, and civil rights'. It is important to note here that whilst the internet has undoubtedly allowed the extreme-right to connect internationally more easily and in more complex networks (Adams & Roscigno 2005), this is not entirely novel. WN books and

³⁴ Michael Billig's (1978, p.162) study on the National Front shows the novelty of anonymity and relative freedom of speech: "the contemporary fascist seeking mass support may digest the lessons of Nazi propagandists, but the lessons cannot be too blatantly displayed for fear of the public taint of Nazism". This fear of ostracization is also highlighted by Fielding (1981) in his classic ethnographic study also of the National Front.

pamphlets have circulated for decades, for example, and the Cotswold agreement of 1962 was signed by the leader of the American Nazi Party, George Lincoln Rockwell, and his British counterpart Colin Jordan.³⁵ However, the exponential increase in the speed and volume of user-generated content, facilitated by digital communication, has fundamentally changed the way these groups now communicate (see, Deuze et al. 2007; Beer & Burrows 2010; Jenkins et al. 2013).

Academic engagement with race and racism online has tended to fall into two broad categories. The first are studies of explicit and organized white supremacy online (see, Back 2002a; Back 2002c; Adams & Roscigno 2005; Atton 2006; Campbell 2006; Daniels 2009b; Daniels 2009a; Foxman & Wolf 2013). Whilst these works usefully explore processes of racist community-making and ‘offline’ organizational practices, all seem to largely take racial categories for granted, deploying relatively static conceptions of whiteness. The second body of literature focuses much more explicitly on race-making and the negotiation of difference online (Nakamura 2013; Nakamura 2008; Nakamura & Chow-White 2012; Sharma 2013; Senft & Noble 2014). Here, the raced nature of online identities is teased out, against the grain of theories of racial ‘passing’³⁶ (e.g. Hansen 2006). This second body of literature often treats race as a variable or as individual identity, leading Daniels (2012, p.711) to argue that what is needed is: ‘a strong theoretical framework that acknowledges the persistence of racism online while simultaneously recognizing the deep roots of racial inequality in existing social structures that

³⁵ This agreement set the foundations for the trans-Atlantic organisation the World Union of National Socialists (WUNS), long before the internet ‘facilitated’ such connections (see Grumke 2003).

³⁶ Where the creative potential and relative anonymity of the web is argued to allow individuals to construct and perform racialized characteristics online which contradict their embodied racialized experience.

shape technoculture'. To this end, she encourages internet researchers to engage with the systemic and structural theories of Feagin (2010b; Feagin & Elias 2013) and Bonilla-Silva (1997).

As highlighted above, early utopian accounts of the internet (Barlow 1996; e.g. Rheingold 2000) highlighted the seemingly democratic and egalitarian nature of the 'global social space'. Indeed, Barlow (1996) proclaims in his *Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace*: 'We are creating a world that all may enter without privilege or prejudice accorded by race, economic power, military force, or station of birth.' As will be clear to all who have spent more than five minutes on the internet, this manifesto describes something of a failed project (Nakamura 2013; Nakamura 2008; Daniels 2009b; Brock 2011). Nakamura (2013, p.102), for example, shows how 'cybertypes' are formed through the naturalization of particular web conventions, such as the tendency of 'clickable boxes' to be populated by narrowly defined ethnic, racial and cultural subjectivities, which '[limit] the way that race can happen in cyberspace.'

Such boundary-making resonates with Fanon's (2001) distinction between *zones of being* and *zones of non-being*, which are expounded by Grosfoguel *et al* (2015, pp.637–8): 'those subjects classed as superior live in [...] the 'zone of being', while subjects that live on the inferior side of the demarcating line live in the 'zone of non-being' [... these zones] are not specific geographical places, but rather positions within racial power relations that operate at a global scale between centres and peripheries, but that are also manifested at a national and local scale against diverse racially 'inferior' groups.'

This articulation of the inferior or 'subhuman' (Grosfoguel *et al.* 2015, p.636) into the zone of non-being is well demonstrated by Noble (2014) in her discursive analysis of media narratives surrounding Trayvon Martin's death. Noble highlights the 'meme-ification' and commodification of Martin's body (re)produced as spectacle through practices such as

‘Trayvoning’.³⁷ Noble’s argument is that once Trayvon Martin became a ‘news commodity’ or ‘spectacle’ (p.16), he is eviscerated of humanity and ‘opportunities for empathic discourse and social change [are derailed].’ Whilst the examples of ‘Trayvoning’ presented by Noble clearly show a lack of empathy, it is important to acknowledge that Martin’s death was articulated into multiple circulating discourses – including many which were explicitly antiracist (see, Carney 2016; Garza 2016). Regardless of this progressive potential, the myth of web-neutrality is often laid bare, through the ease with which white racial structures and ideology are reasserted (Bonilla-Silva 2006). Indeed, as Senft and Noble (2014, pp.112–3) argue: ‘given that the internet began as a project funded by the US military, extended through efforts of universities and delivered to the masses through private business (all historically White [sic] male-dominated institutions), the dream that it might portend an inherently democratic future has always been somewhat unrealistic.’

Another theme of early internet utopianism is the unfettered flow of information, and the construction of translocal communities (see, Rheingold 2000). In analyzing white supremacy online Daniels (2009b), borrowing from Back (2002a), talks of ‘the Internet’s importance in forming a global white identity that transcends local and regional ties’. Whilst it is clear that global WN connections have proliferated as a result of the web, I show in Chapter Six that, even in organized racist movements, race – including whiteness – is contingent and flexible. Furthermore, the Forum is balkanized into discrete national sub-fora, and definitions of

³⁷ Trayvoning was a deeply problematic meme where young men (mostly white) were photographed posing prone, in the final position of Trayvon Martin’s dead body, holding a can of juice and a packet of Skittles sweets – as Trayvon had.

whiteness on SF, and inclusion in the zone of being, is often intensely predicated on geography as much as perceived biology.³⁸

Materialities, topologies, and the myth of cyberspace

Early scholarly optimism surrounding the internet's potential to transcend certain traditional categories of difference through a sort of post-corporeal cyborg utopianism (Turkle 1995; Rheingold 2000), has given way, in more contemporary literature, to a different understanding (Boellstorff 2008; Miller 2011; Miller & Horst 2012b; Baym 2015). Fernback (1999, p.215), in developing Gertrude Stein's famous aphorism - 'there is no there there' (quoted in Anderson 2006, p.5) - in order to interrogate the nature of online 'spaces' and 'communities' asks 'is there a there there?'. However, digital technologies and online spaces become ever more integrated, through mobile technology and the interactivity of web 2.0, into daily routines situated *in* space. Because of this integration and the consequent hybridisation of online and offline spaces, one answer to Fernback's question might be that there is, in fact, a 'there' *here* (and a 'here' *there*). This conclusion is supported by Massey's (2005, p.96) argument that 'the world of

³⁸ As in the racializing process which took place on SF following beating of a white man by a group of black men after the Michael Brown verdict in Ferguson. Debate circulated about the 'true' whiteness of the victim, who was a Bosnian migrant:

I'm not 'nitpicking' on some personality flaw of his that I don't like. I'm saying that he is a foreign coloniser; his people are part of the problem. I have no more of a sense of solidarity with him than I do with a Mexican or a Somali.

Biological whiteness is not enough to justify the immigration of tens of thousands of people to my country. This is particularly true when we're talking about a distantly-related group of whites who are predominantly Muslim and who fled their own country because their Serbian neighbours got tired of dealing with them.

It's only by a bizarre twist of irony that the black thugs targeted him rather than an actual Missourian. (@Southron Blood)

physical space and the world of electronically mediated connection do not exist as somehow two separate layers, one [...] floating ethereally above the materiality of the other'. As Jensen (2011, p.51 emphasis added) asserts: 'it is not so much that we go online into a different political system or economic market, *but rather that politics and markets exist online as well*'.

Whilst some early theorists of the digital, such as William Mitchell (1996, p.8 emphasis in original), argued that 'cyberspace is profoundly *antispacial*', it is clear that this couldn't be further from the truth. In Chapter Four, I show how the materiality of the digital (see, Kitchin & Dodge 2011; Kinsley 2014) grounds the internet in geographically-bounded space. As Sam Kinsley (2014, p.375) argues: 'Circuits of connection, energy transfer, cognition and meaning are composed between bodies, devices, infrastructure, data.' The notion of cyberspace as transcendental is clearly undermined by this materiality. Furthermore, I follow Miller (2011, p.xiii), who argues that 'there is no such thing as the internet [but rather] each place produces the internet that we find there'.

Here, Boellstorff's (2008; 2016) argument that the digital situates the individual in alternative worlds, is challenged. Instead, it is clear that online spaces are an extension of the offline; inflecting back upon each other in a process of mutual constitution. Indeed, Baym (2015, p.152) argues that: 'mediated communication is not a space, it is a set of tools people use to connect, each with meanings that depend on the others and which can only be understood as deeply embedded in and influenced by the daily realities of embodied life.' It is these connections that have profoundly changed the way in which moral panics move, as well as reshaped the geographies of (anti)racist praxis around the moveable boundaries of the digital.

Ash Amin (2007, p.102) declares that processes of globalization have effected 'a radical shift in socio-spatial organization, towards forms of topological organization that no longer correspond to neat scalar or territorial packages.' In this thesis, I explore the relationship

between proximity and connectibility (see, Latour 1996), which animates such shifts. Here, I build on a relatively recent and fruitful topological ‘turn’ (as proclaimed by Shields 2012) in human geography (e.g. Allen 2009; Allen 2011; Coleman 2011; Shields 2012; Hinchliffe et al. 2013; Lury 2013; Martin & Secor 2014; Dixon & Jones 2015; Lata & Minca 2016), in order to better understand the topological practices and circulation of organized racism online.

Whilst topography implies the metrical geometry of Euclidean space (Serres & Latour 1995), topological analysis acknowledges the complex spatialities of ‘twists, stretches and folds’ (Dixon & Jones 2015, p.224). Here, Serres and Latour’s (1995, p.60) metaphor of the crumpled handkerchief is illuminating:

If you take a handkerchief and spread it out in order to iron it, you can see in it certain fixed distances and proximities. If you sketch a circle in one area, you can mark out nearby points and measure far-off distances. Then take the same handkerchief and crumple it, by putting it in your pocket. Two distant points suddenly are close, even superimposed. If, further, you tear it in certain places, two points that were close can become very distant.

It is increasingly clear to me, then, that understanding the power geometries (Massey 1993) produced in and through digital connectibility can only be understood by attention to the topological. Indeed, Lury et al (2012, p.19) argue that digital social networks are ‘topological actualities in which culture is increasingly defined and produced out of the in-betweens of digital databases that are themselves continuously being remade within the multiple relational circuits of technical-geographical milieus.’ It is these relational circuits and technical-geographical milieus that I examine in Chapter Four.

Bruno Latour (1996, p.371) proposes a theory of connection and network which allows us to move beyond physical proximity in understanding the ease with which information may travel or links may be made. He remarks that: ‘an Alaskan reindeer might be ten metres away from another one and they might nevertheless be cut off by a pipeline of 800 miles that makes their mating for ever impossible’. Another reindeer may be 50 miles away but with no

impediment to their meeting. Although the original reindeer is closest to the reindeer on the other side of the pipeline in terms of proximity, she is more closely connected to the reindeer 50 miles away by virtue of the potential for connection. This potential is, in effect, what the internet has done for the WN movement. The folding of SF into everyday spaces increases the potential for translocal WN connection, visibility, and recruitment. Indeed, the internet provides a forum for spatially diffuse racists to (seemingly) anonymously connect to other like-minded racists (see, Atton 2006; Daniels 2009b; Simi & Futrell 2010; Foxman & Wolf 2013).

The politics of a topological analysis are laid out by John Allen (2011, p.285), who argues that ‘conventional geometric descriptions are now, for better or worse, somewhat exhausted as a spatial vocabulary of power’. Instead, he advocates ‘a topological sensibility [... which] prompts us to think again about such things as scale and territory, networks and connection in a less rigid manner, but above all about power and its geometry, in ways that make a difference’ (p.284). I am convinced that a digitally-inflected antiracist praxis *must* incorporate such a sensibility.

Regardless of debates about ontologies of scale in geography (e.g. Marston et al. 2005; Collinge 2006; Jonas 2006), the question of scale as a category of practice is at the heart of organized racism’s ideologies and agendas. Flint (2004, p.7), for example, argues that: ‘hate-group activity is a political stance aimed at resisting existing scales of political activity with the intent of creating new ones’. This alter-scalar agenda is facilitated by the use of the internet which Back (2002a) argues allows ‘new horizons for the expression of whiteness [... becoming] the means to combine profoundly local grammars of racial exclusion within a trans-local and international reach that is made viable through digital technology’. Here the topological nature of social media’s connectibility (Tucker & Goodings 2014) is made clear in the folding together of seemingly distant points.

Whilst early permutations of the internet were relatively static and non-participatory, recent advances in internet technology and computer mediated communication have led to the proliferation of participatory digital media (see, Beer & Burrows 2010). The connections fostered by social media have had a profound effect on hate groups' development as articulated by Groshek and Engelbert (2012, p.184): 'the shift from traditional models of top-down broadcast media towards many-to-many networks of media production and distribution has noticeably altered political organization and campaigning'. Indeed, I show in Chapter Five – on mediation and remediation – that spaces such as SF require engaged content management by appointed moderators in order to be effective. It is the osmotic overlapping spheres of individuals' personal networks and the moderation of online spaces which constitute and reinforce the organisational network through which this many-to-many communication spreads. Just as in Anderson's (2006, p.44) famous theory of national consciousness - produced through print capitalism's ability to construct 'the embryo of the nationally imagined community' - the internet may constitute a new way of imagining trans-national racialized communities.

This resonates with Back et al's (1998, p.86) argument that, 'the internet [...] provides the medium through which racial desires – however impractical – can be represented [... producing] a racist utopia that is entirely dependent on cyberspace to give it meaning'. These spaces, as Gilroy (2012, p.381) argues, mean that 'online, localised racial abuse has been compounded by multinational, white-supremacist crowd-sourcing'. In this way, argues Daniels (2009b, p.42), the internet is key in forming a 'global white identity that transcends local and regional ties'. Paradoxically, there seems to be little contradiction between such global aspirations and the virulent nationalism of white supremacist organisations which advocate a sense of 'White Pride World Wide' in order to build a global racist subculture.

Conclusion

I have used this chapter to show the development of my own thought, as well as to point to gaps which this thesis attempts to fill. In doing so, I have tried to open lines of theoretical connection which allow me to do so. I argue that thinking on moral panics has not caught up with work in media studies, where theories of prosumption (Beer & Burrows 2010; Fuchs 2011) convergence (Jenkins 2006; Glynn 2015) and participatory web culture (Deuze et al. 2007; Shifman 2014; Wiggins & Bowers 2015; Highfield 2016) have shown that circulating discourses are increasingly open to remixing and (re)circulation. As a result, I argue in Chapter Five, the construction, circulation, and consequences of moral panics have been fundamentally transformed. Moral panics have taken on a memetic quality – whereby the convergence of traditional, new, and social media has allowed for the contestation of mainstream narratives and the circulation of multiple competing discourses surrounding mediated events. As moral panics have become more diffuse and contested, WNs – through outlets such as Stormfront – have been able to participate in the reinterpretation and (re)circulation of panic discourses.

I go on to outline the development of my own thinking on race - from deploying predominantly structural and representational accounts (Hall 1980; Omi & Winant 1994; Bonilla-Silva 1997; Feagin 2006; Wolfe 2016); through discovering more-than-representational affective accounts (Ahmed 2004a; Ahmed 2004b; Massumi 2005; Saldanha 2006; Swanton 2010b; Saldanha & Adams 2012); to the work which brings the structural and the affective together in useful ways (e.g. Grossberg 1996; Hall 1997; Butler 2009; Grossberg 2010; hooks 2013). In doing so, I argue that the frictions which exist between theories of representation and the more-than-representational don't necessarily need to be resolved, since they often produce a creative tension which is useful in its own right. In Chapter Six, which analyses SF's repertoires of race, I show how attention to the structural and the affective is helpful at different points to think about

responses to racist media events. Furthermore, in Chapter Six, I also challenge Saldanha's (2006) proliferative project by highlighting the already cacophonous and contingent repertoires of race deployed by WNs in different contexts.

In the final section of this review, I explore the digital geographies which shape processes of race-making. I examine the importance of the internet to the development and growth of the WN movement (Daniels 2009b; Simi & Futrell 2010). I then move on to think about the materialities and topologies of the digital, to show that the danger of WN activity on the web is not only in relation to recruitment, but is twofold. First, the intense translocal connection of WNs to each other; and second, the folding of SF into everyday spaces. Here, I argue that attention to the topological nature of WN connectivity is essential to a digitally-inflected antiracism – something I pick up in much more detail in Chapter Four.

This chapter has situated my thesis in the wider literatures, and given a sense of the development of my thinking throughout this project. In the next chapter, I turn my attention to the methodological development of my research. There, I show the iterative processes which have shaped this thesis, and explore the challenges and imperatives of research online.

Chapter 3. 'Lurking' as method: 'manufacturing' field and archive

The object is to figure out what [...] makes oppressive and liberatory structures work, and what makes them fall apart. (Gilmore 2002, p.17)

White nationalist and white supremacist organisations were some of the first groups to set up digital spaces in the early 1990s (Back 2002a). Whilst technologically innovative, these were far from exceptional spaces, becoming an extension to offline racist spaces (Daniels 2009a). The same processes of digital/physical crossover have shaped the internet since its inception (Evans 2013). Because of this, a degree of recursive feedback between the two became common, with actions in physical space feeding into discussions online as well as, in some cases, being driven by such discussions. This has been particularly true since the advent of web 2.0 and the associated proliferation of interactivity online. Miller and Horst (2012b, p.28), in fact, argue that our very humanness is reflexively tied up with the way in which we use technologies: 'within months, a new capacity becomes assumed to such a degree that, when it breaks down, we feel we have lost both a basic human right and a valued prosthetic arm of who we now are as humans'. This corporeal metaphor is also developed by Turkle (2011, p.17) who describes mobile technologies as phantom limbs because they are 'so much a part of [users]'.

Technology's integration into users' lives seems clear, particularly in the age of participatory web cultures where 'prosumption' – the blurring of production and consumption of digital media – is the norm (Beer & Burrows 2010). Bowman-Grieve (2009, p.1005) argues that 'where public space is limited in the 'real' world individuals will use the internet, arguably increasingly, to discuss, debate, and dissent', showing that the internet constitutes a vibrant dialogical space. This ability to react in near-real-time to unfolding events, argue Bruns and Burgess (2011), produces ad hoc and ephemeral publics. Importantly though, as Boellstorff

(2012, p.42) argues, '[a] transcendental understanding of the virtual is clearly wrong: the virtual is as profane as the physical, as both are constituted 'digitally' in their mutual relationship'.

The internet as a medium must be understood as constituted by both material 'technological delivery systems' – cables, computers, and software – and the social and cultural practices which grow up around these (Jenkins 2006). This mutual constitution produces what Escobar (1994, p.214 emphasis in original) terms 'a regime of *technosociality*' which he describes as 'a broad process of sociocultural construction set in motion in the wake of [computer and information technologies]'. In examining the digital, then, it is important to pay attention to both material communication technologies and the ways that they have been integrated into users' daily lives.

When I set out on this PhD project, I had just finished an MRes studying constructions of the Scottish nation on the Scottish Defence League's Facebook page. I had been an active antiracist campaigner against them during my undergraduate degree, and was keen to add further depth to my previously funded small-scale undergraduate study of the group. During my Masters, George Zimmerman shot and killed the unarmed black teenager Trayvon Martin in Florida, and was acquitted of murder. I was already monitoring Stormfront regularly, and was fascinated by the frantic discussions there surrounding the Martin case. As I moved from the MRes into the PhD, the Scottish Defence League went into terminal decline, and my attention shifted toward SF and white nationalist reaction to circulating racialized media representations of such racist violence.

In this chapter, I outline the methodology which informs this thesis. In doing so, I start by briefly tracing two methodological failures to show the development of this project's design. In the next section, I set out my event-focused case-study approach which, drawing together Fiske (1996) with Vera and Feagin (2004), analyses discursive struggles around particular 'racist

media events'. In this section, I also talk a little about the practices of *manufacturing* both field site and archive through choices around framing and bounding 'in the field.'

Covert research is somewhat controversial, and the next section deals with my own covert engagement with SF and the ethical considerations that this has necessitated. Here I justify my use of 'lurking' as method. This requires dual attention to the ethics of covert research in digital environments, as well as the politics and ethics of antiracist research. In attending to this duality, I draw on Calvey (2008) to argue for a contingent and situated ethics. Finally, I reflect on my positionality, critically considering how my own taken-for-granted whiteness shapes my engagement with the forum and the case-studies (Back 2002b; see, Frankenberg 2004). I also consider the emotional labour of researching in the 'dirty work site' (Sanders-McDonagh 2014, p.214) of a white nationalist forum. Furthermore, I argue that in antiracist work on organised racism, the researcher's ethical responsibilities extend beyond the researched subject, to their marginalised and racialized targets. First, though, I present the methodological failures that shaped my PhD research.

Formative failures

Before I outline the methods eventually employed in this thesis, I will briefly touch upon two methodological failures which have shaped this project - explaining the limited number of interviews, and the lack of a more directly engaged approach to SF. I do so to show the empirical trajectory of this PhD, and to highlight some of the challenges and considerations of researching profoundly mistrustful and potentially dangerous groups.

Organisational ethnography

Having come to PhD research from a background of antiracist politics, I was keen to understand SF through the work of the organisations which oppose them. My first thought was to carry out an internship with one such organization, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), conducting an ethnography of their counter-extremism work. The SPLC are a civil rights law centre based in Montgomery, AL. They have been monitoring SF since its inception, and, as such, have in-depth knowledge of the Forum, its members and history. Organizational ethnographies have the potential to critically show ‘hidden’ dimensions of the workings of organizations, as well as showing the relations between actors within organizations and their context (see, Yanow et al. 2012). It was clear to me that this could be a useful way to understand the workings of the SPLC and its antiracist practices.

However, considering the challenge of access in organizational ethnography, van der Waal (2009) comments that the reputation of organizations that are publicly active in economic or political spheres are often vulnerable. In many cases, he argues, this leads to an assertive denial of access. Indeed, in practice, gaining access to the SPLC turned out to be far more difficult than anticipated. The very real threat posed to the Centre and its staff by WNs means that the SPLC is wary of strangers, and their building is under 24/7 armed guard. Whilst Mark Potok – Editor-in-Chief of the organisation’s quarterly *Intelligence Report* – was courteous enough in our initial email exchange, it was clear that my plans of embedding myself in the organisation would come to nothing:

You’re welcome to come here and interview a few people, as you request. And I’m happy to take you on a tour of the building and show you a bit about how things work. But we really can’t go beyond that to have you here observing for days. We’re a completely closed-to-the-public building, very high security, and you always will have to be accompanied inside, so it’s just not practical for us to allow that. (Mark Potok – SPLC – personal communication)

After a lengthy exchange of emails with Potok, in which I pitched various alternatives, it was agreed that I would visit the centre and conduct interviews with key staff. Eventually I visited the SPLC in April 2015, whilst in the United States for a conference. Although my plans for a more engaged ethnography had fallen flat, I was able to interview six investigative journalists tasked with monitoring and reporting on SF, as well as Potok.

Keen to be punctual, and not knowing the city, I arrived outside the SPLC's offices twenty minutes early. The entrance wasn't marked, and I walked back and forth on the street outside a few times to kill time and find my bearings. I obviously looked suspicious because it wasn't long before I was approached by two gruff armed guards. After giving them Mark Potok's name as a point of contact, and handing over my ID, I was escorted into the building through an air-locked doorway. Once inside, I emptied my pockets and bag into a tray to be X-rayed and was patted down by yet another guard. In the reception area a glass cabinet displayed the melted remains of a clock which was recovered from the SPLC's previous offices after they were burned down by three Klansmen in 1983. Security is taken seriously by this organisation for a reason.³⁹

It was clear to see why an unknown researcher in the building would be practically problematic. Instead of being disheartened, I took advantage of my failure to secure access, shifting my focus away somewhat from their day-to-day activities, and toward working with the knowledge they produced. The material from these interviews is used throughout this thesis to supplement my own observations.

³⁹ See Cindi Katz (2013) on the hyper-visible performance of security.

'Netnography'

My second methodological failure also involves access and interviewing – perhaps highlighting the broader challenge of researching such controversial and potentially dangerous groups. Although face-to-face ethnographic interviews have been used to great effect in understanding the racist right (Ezekiel 1995; Blee 1996; Blee 2007), I soon found that digital interviews with SF members would prove difficult. Feeling uncomfortable with the racist performance required to 'pass' as an SF user to gather data by means of a covert netnography (see, Kozinets 2010), I resolved to carry out asynchronous online interviews with SF members through the Forum's private messaging function. Once I had 'lurked' for long enough to gather the necessary data and have a sense of the questions I wanted to ask – mostly about how the Forum fitted into users' daily lives – I drew up a list of the most active members in the threads I was following and began contacting them.

Far right groups are understandably wary of strangers, and overt forms of research often fall flat (see, Back 2002b; Blee 2003; Fielding 2003; Spicker 2011). As Kathleen Blee (2003, p.201) points out: 'racist activists tend to be disingenuous, secretive, deliberately intimidating, and prone to evasive or dishonest answers. Standard interviews often are unproductive, yielding little more than organizational slogans repeated as personal beliefs.' For this reason, Blee (1996; 2003; 2007) carries out 'life history' interviews which generate personal narratives rather than directly probing interviewees' beliefs and commitments. Building on this approach, I resolved to follow Miller's (2011) lead by asking members about the way they used the internet, rather than directly about their politics.

In planning to interview SF members, I naïvely assumed that my whiteness would give me privileged access to WNs. The problematic nature of collusion in a shared whiteness, and the potential normalization of white supremacy aside (see, Back 2007),⁴⁰ I had not properly considered the ideological chasm that existed between me and the committed racists I wanted to speak to. As has been argued by Frankenberg (2001) and Back (2002b), the political differences between racists and antiracists often far outweigh any perception of shared racial identity. Indeed, Back (2002b) shows that white supremacists often share more in common with black supremacists than they do with white antiracists. I soon found this out for myself.

Gaining trust in online spaces is a challenge and, as Salmons (2014) argues, researchers who are used to an embodied sensibility must find other ways to build presence online. To this end, I used my university email as a point of contact and linked to my university web page, hoping that these would present me in a symbolic position of institutional authority and smooth my access to Forum users (see, Bourdieu & Thompson 1991). Ultimately, it was this openness which undermined my plans of interviewing members.

I had managed to have tentative conversations with three members – with varying degrees of success – when my research account was permanently disabled for ‘petitioning users for personal information’. Unable to interview SF members, and having failed to gain longer-term access to the SPLC, I was reliant on the publicly available forum. I soon found that the empirical material collected through covert participant observation was more than rich enough to build this thesis around. In order to narrow my scope, I focused on racist media events. It is to this approach that I now turn.

⁴⁰ I explore this in greater depth later in this chapter.

Event-focus

Approaching a web forum as vast and complex as SF – with 146 sub-sections⁴¹ and fifteen years of archived discussion – can be an overwhelming undertaking. Founder Don Black's efforts to maintain the Forum as a comprehensive living record of the WN movement's recent history – deleting very little content – means that the Forum is a sprawling trove of rich material. To narrow down the empirical focus of this thesis, then, I have turned to Fiske's (1996, p.2) 'media event' as described in Chapter One.

Following Fiske, I am interested in the social reality of media events as they pass through SF. For Fiske (p.8), '[a media event] is a site of popular engagement and involvement, not just a scenic view to be photographed and left behind [... it] also invites intervention and motivates people to struggle to redirect at least some of the currents flowing through it to serve their interests.' It is this popular engagement and involvement which makes media events a useful lens through which to critically examine the discursive struggles of specific actors (see, Glynn 2015 on the 9/11 Truth Movement).

Media events warrant such scrutiny according to Fiske, because their remediation has the potential to shift structures of feeling (see, Williams 1977).⁴² As I began the empirical work for this thesis, a series of racist events threatened to unsettle white American 'post-racial' structures of feeling (see, Goldberg 2016). The shooting of unarmed black teen Trayvon Martin, and the acquittal of his killer, in 2012, brought the everyday brutality of racist violence and structural inequalities into the white field of vision (Noble 2014); whilst the similarly legitimised, and highly mediatised, killing of Michael Brown by a white police officer in Ferguson two years later

⁴¹ Correct as of 29 July 2016.

⁴² Williams (1977, p.132) describes structures of feeling as 'meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt.'

became a rallying point for antiracist politics. During this period, SF was particularly active as WNs scrambled to make sense of, and contest, circulating discourses of white privilege and structural inequality. It was clear that an important conjunctural shift might be taking place. This thesis is based on covert observation and analysis of three case studies from this period of activity.⁴³

Whilst I draw on Fiske's (1996) attention to the (re)mediated constitution of media events in this thesis, I sharpen my focus employing Vera and Feagin's (2004) method of analysing 'racist events.' Such events, according to Vera and Feagin, are defined by:

(1) the white perpetrators; (2) the targets and victims of colour; (3) the immediate context, particularly the social structure, spatial setting, and temporal frame; (4) the panoply of instruments used in the ritualized practices; (5) the playing out of actions in a ritualized and iterative sequence; (6) the psychological and motivational impulses, including socially sanctioned and personal ideologies; and (7) the longer-term aftermath and societal consequences (p.68).

To focus on events, they argue, places an emphasis on complex assemblages of 'human activity and relationships [as opposed to] individual prejudices, stereotypes, and discriminatory acts' (p.66).

Not all media events are racist events, and not all racist events are media events. It is the intersection of these two forms which interests me here – and, though Fiske's *Media Matters* deals specifically with issues of race and racism, in the interests of specificity, I refer to *racist media events* in this thesis. In this thesis, then, I have employed Vera and Feagin's definition of the 'racist event' alongside Fiske's 'media event' to select three case-studies. These were the most active discussion topics on the Forum, fitting Vera and Feagin's framework, during my initial period of

⁴³ I discuss the ethics of this approach below.

observation, and they provided a lens through which to study the circulation of discourses surrounding such events.

Writing about her choice of field site in Sudan, Cindy Katz (1994, p.69) reflects that the final site arose from ‘an amalgam of historical circumstance, intellectual criteria, practical specifications, and default.’ Building on the failures outlined above, and acknowledging the increased attention to racist violence there, I narrowed the scope of my empirical study to the most active sub-forum on SF – *Newslinks & Articles*. Here, circulating media events are posted, dissected, and recirculated. I followed breaking news closely eventually settling on the three case-studies outlined in the introduction, constructing an archive out of circulating discussion.

As soon as interactions become ‘data’ or ‘material’, they are contrived by virtue of being bounded by the researcher. Thus, I challenge Silverman’s (2007, p.37) claim that too many researchers prefer to ‘manufacture’ their data through interviews, rather than ‘find’ it in the ‘field’. Field sites do not exist as pristine and natural spaces waiting to be observed or disrupted by the researcher (see, Speer 2008), but rather must always be ‘manufactured’. This is particularly true, I argue, of online sites, where the hyperlinked nature of connections makes delimiting a ‘site’ a necessarily prescriptive exercise. Indeed, Amit (2000, p.6) argues that:

The notion of immersion implies that the ‘field’ which ethnographers enter exists as an independently bounded set of relationships and activities which is autonomous of the fieldwork through which it is discovered. Yet in a world of infinite interconnections and overlapping contexts, the ethnographic field cannot simply exist, awaiting discovery. It has to be laboriously constructed, prised apart from all the other possibilities for contextualization to which its constituent relationships and connections could also be referred.

If the field is manufactured or constructed, the same is true of the archive. Whilst Kozinets (2010, p.104) argues that archival netnographic data are ‘unaffected by the actions of the researcher’, it is important to acknowledge the curating work of the researcher. Here, I argue

that my ‘data’⁴⁴ – whilst not directly elicited – are far from naturally occurring (see, Speer 2008). I made many theoretically and strategically informed decisions about which parts of SF I paid close attention to, manufacturing the field site and the bounded ‘archive’ of material.

Indeed, thinking about the *make-do-ness* of archival methods, Hayden Lorimer (2010, p.258) observes that ‘[activities] take shape on-the-hoof, are improvised according to circumstance, conditions underfoot and things to hand.’ Furthermore, as Withers (2002, p.305) argues: ‘the adoption of ethnographic methods in human geography and cognate fields means that researchers create and carry with them (and may carry *within* themselves) a ‘body’ of knowledge as a personal archive.’⁴⁵ It is this personal archive that I argue I have ‘manufactured’ through the empirical work carried out for this thesis. Importantly, as I worked, I slipped easily between my ‘field site’ and the rest of the world wide web – checking my emails, updating Facebook or Twitter, and reading the news – showing the messiness of boundaries in hyperlinked web spaces (see, Morrow et al. 2015).

As Crang and Mohamad (2016, p.276) point out: ‘[people’s] postings and volunteered information on social media are influenced by the contexts in which they find themselves, where they make choices over their self-disclosure and self-censorship.’ As I show in Chapter Six, SF is maintained by its leader and moderators as a living archive of the WN movement. In this way, my own ‘archive’ is pragmatically carved out of a wider archive curated by the members of the Forum. It is then interpreted and framed through my application of critical discourse analysis (CDA).

⁴⁴ I use this term advisedly.

⁴⁵ See, also Marcus (1998).

Discursive struggle and conjunctural discourse analysis

Fiske (1996, p.4) argues that: ‘although discourse may not produce reality, it does produce the instrumental sense of the real that a society or social formation uses in its everyday life [...] we can know an event only by putting it into discourse, so an event is always continuous with its discursive construction.’ Understanding the discursive struggles which surround media events, then, is an essential part of understanding the dynamics of power. Here, I take my lead from Dittmer (2010, p.285), who argues that: ‘the powerful have an innate sense of the power of discourse and language [...] and simply] writing about the role of discourse is thus to de-naturalize the power relations that prevent a more just future.’

With this in mind, this thesis is based on conjunctural discourse analysis of specific discussion threads from the Forum. In line with the ‘problem-oriented, critical approach’ of critical discourse analysis⁴⁶ (Fairclough et al. 2011, p.358), I began with a broad focus – white nationalism online – and honed in from there. In a similar manner to grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss 2009), I did not start from *a priori* assumptions, but from the empirical material. Indeed, Fairclough *et al* (2011, p.368) advocate this funnel approach: ‘[methodology] is the process during which, informed through theory, [the] topic is further refined so as to construct the objects of research (pinpointing specific foci and research questions).’

I had been sporadically monitoring activities on SF for a couple of years, and since it is the largest, and most active, WN site on the web, I began directing my energies toward deeper engagement there. As outlined above, the specific focus and research questions of my research, revealed themselves as I gathered and analysed material from SF. Increased media attention to

⁴⁶ Fairclough *et al* (2011) argue that discourse, in CDA, is both socially constituted and socially shaped, whilst the approach’s explicitly critical nature positions it on the side of the oppressed and against the oppressor(s).

racist violence quickly filtered into SF discussion, and I became interested in exploring WN responses.

Eventually, I settled on three case-studies which seemed indicative of conjunctural forces, and I narrowed my observations to discussion threads relating to these on the most active subforum – *Newslinks and Articles*. After ‘scraping’ each of these threads – using specially written software to extract information – I transferred them into NVivo for analysis. Importantly, for studying convergent digital environments, Theo van Leeuwen (cited in, Wodak & Meyer 2009, p.16), argues that:

Critical discourse analysis has [...] moved beyond language, taking on board that discourses are often multimodally realized, not only through text and talk, but also through other modes of communication such as images ... Overall, then, critical discourse analysis has moved towards more explicit dialogue between social theory and practice, richer contextualization, greater interdisciplinarity and greater attention to the multimodality of discourse

Indeed, circulating discourses on SF highlight the importance of a multimodal analysis, with images, memes, avatars, and hyperlinks revealed as important sites of discursive struggle (see, Rose 2007; Nakamura 2008; Shifman 2014; Kligler-Vilenchik & Thorson 2015), and these were coded and analysed alongside textual discourses.

Broadcast	Media	> Abstraction
> SF broadcast	> Alternative media	> Concretisation
Censorship	> Mainstream media	> Whiteness
> Public relations	> Media crit	>> Anti-white-liberal
Connection	>> 'Jewsmedia'	>> Consciousness
Conspiracy	>> 'Libtards'	>> Definitions
Context	> Media sharing	>> Supremacy
Culture	> Remediation	>> Victim
> Community	> Meme	> Anti-Semitism
> Multiculturalism	Moral panic	> Blackness
Economy	> Exploitation	Representations of self
> Class	> Management	Representations of 'other'
Debate	Morality	SPLC
Elites – 'ZOG'	> Justification	Scale
Gender	> Target	State
Ideology	> Grief	Tactics
> Dissemination	>> Victims	Virtual – physical
Information sharing	>> Movement	
Lurker dialogue	Race	

Figure 3 – Final coding frame

On my initial read through the threads for each case-study, I drew up a preliminary coding frame which directed my deeper second reading. During this second reading, I removed nodes⁴⁷ which contributed little, and created new nodes as themes emerged (see Figure 3 for final coding frame). Finally, I worked meticulously through every post in every relevant thread (more than ten thousand posts), coding and annotating the material.

Glaser and Strauss (2009, p.34) argue that 'it is presumptuous to assume that one begins to know the relevant categories and hypotheses until the first days in the field, at least, are over.' Therefore, rather than setting out an *a priori* hypothesis, the research questions around which this thesis is based arose from observations on the Forum; repetitive close engagement with the threads; and the process of coding and re-coding.

⁴⁷ NVivo uses a system of nodes to organise data. Codes, here, are nested into a hierarchical framework of 'parent' and 'child' nodes (e.g. Race > Whiteness >> Consciousness).

To 'lurk' or not to 'lurk'?

Examining methodology in the digital age, Daniels (2009b, p.195) writes: 'the social world is changing because of the internet, and sociological methods for studying patterned human behaviour must change as well'. Her own work in *Cyber Racism* draws on what she describes as 'passive oppositional [lurking]' – where lurking is defined as reading without posting or commenting (p.58). Daniels' work informs my own research methods, and in this section I briefly discuss the ethics of 'lurking' as method.

There are a number of ethical considerations in researching what Harding (1991, p.392) calls the 'repugnant cultural other'. As Blee (2007, p.125) asserts: 'scholars of the far right often confront the tangled issues of balancing scholarly ethics of fairness to the subject with moral and political interests in exposing and helping to disable the very movements they are studying'. This is echoed by Barrett (1987, p.137) who constructs his research on the Canadian far right with 'the explicit design of undermining the beliefs and activities of the anti-Semites and racists'. Advancing a similar political agenda, I argue here that the antiracist researcher's responsibilities should ultimately be to those who experience racism. However, it is my aim in this PhD to remain open to the human experiences of white supremacists and to present them truthfully, but critically, with the express intention of advancing anti-racist agendas.

A number of key texts have been written in recent years which outline ethnographic approaches to the internet (e.g. Boellstorff 2008; Garcia et al. 2009; Kozinets 2010; Boellstorff et al. 2012; Boellstorff 2012; Miller & Horst 2012a). A running theme, postulates that direct engagement and participation with the communities and web spaces that one is studying is the bedrock of *good research*. Indeed, whilst Boellstorff *et al.* (2012, p.69) remark that, 'in many cases virtual worlds allow ethnographers fuller participation than in physical world contexts', they go on to argue that 'ethical ethnographic investigation avoids deception' – including undercover

observation (p.142). Bell (2001, p.198) goes further, arguing that lurking sets up a 'powerful and distant position' from which the researcher appropriates the discourse and actions of research subjects. As discussed, when I first started to design this research project, I envisioned a 'netnography' (Kozinets 2010) of SF, but later abandoned this approach.⁴⁸

Kozinets (2010, p.60) describes netnography as 'participant-observational research based in online fieldwork. It uses computer-mediated communications as a source of data to arrive at the ethnographic understanding and representation of a cultural or communal phenomenon'. Kozinets suggests, contra Hine (2000), that there should be a distinction between research on online communities and research on communities online.⁴⁹ Following the pattern outlined above, Kozinets (2010, p.75) argues that if *netnographers* are to carry out work which 'stands up to the standards of quality ethnography', it is important that they do not lurk, download data and analyse from the sidelines. A participatory approach is also advocated by Beer and Burrows (2007 n.p.):

in order to get some idea of users and their practices it is necessary to become a 'wikizen'. The social researcher will need to be immersed, they will need to be participatory, and they will need to 'get inside' and make some 'friends'. We will have to become part of the collaborative cultures of Web 2.0, we will need to build our own profiles, make some flickering friendships, expose our own choices, preferences and views, and make ethical decisions about what we reveal and the information we filter out of these communities and into our findings. Our ability to carry out virtual ethnographies will by necessity involve moving from the role of observer to that of participant observer.

⁴⁸ Netnography describes ethnographic approaches to studying online groups and is a portmanteau of internet and ethnography coined by Robert Kozinets (2010). According to Kozinets (2010) netnography differs from traditional face-to-face ethnography in a number of key ways: it is predominantly text based; it gives access to potentially unobservable behaviours; it is auto-archived; and private/public space and interaction are much more ambiguous.

⁴⁹ My research focuses on an online community but this is not to say that it can be studied in isolation. Stormfront members are real people in real contexts and, as such, the discussions they have in the digital space of Stormfront may, and do, have material effects in the physical spaces that they inhabit daily (see Back et al. 1998).

Whilst I appreciate Kozinets and Beer & Burrows' position, it is clear from my own research experience, that participant observation is not always possible – or even desirable.

Covert research and deception are historically contentious in the social sciences and have generated a lot of debate around their justification and conditions of use (Homan 1980; Homan & Bulmer 1982; Lauder 2003; Calvey 2008; Spicker 2011). Whilst Kozinets (2010, p.147), for example, asserts that 'there must be absolutely no deception about what you are doing in [an] online community', Lauder (2003) argues that 'the socially destructive nature of racism [...] legitimises the use of deception in order to gain access to insider information that will benefit society'. Whilst Hine (2000, p.23) argues that participation online leads the researcher to 'a deeper sense of understanding of meaning creation', I contend that this depends on what kinds of meaning-making one wants to understand. Indeed, King (1996, p.120) argues that, 'it is important to attempt studies of [virtual communities] without disturbing the interpersonal process being displayed. Requesting permission from the group to conduct a study based on the messages that groups generate is often a gross disruption of the very process of interest to social scientists'. In this sense, it seemed clear that following the circulation of media events and practices and processes of discursive struggle would be best accomplished without disrupting the Forum. Furthermore, I shared the concerns of Fielding (2003) who justifies his own covert study of the National Front by pointing out their hostility to research and the deleterious effect this would have had on his important findings.

I argue, therefore, that the ethics of covert research are more complex than often presented. As Calvey (2008, p.914) argues, 'Covert research is part of a somewhat submerged tradition that needs to be recovered for future usage in its own right rather than being treated correctively as teaching material for cases of 'failed or bad ethics.' One of the main concerns regarding covert research methods is intrusion into the privacy of the subjects of study. Privacy,

however, is a contingent and contextual process with varying cultural interpretations and standards (Ess 2014). Stine Lomborg (2012) asserts that privacy is negotiated differently in different online spaces. Indeed, Markham and Buchanan (2012, p.7), writing on behalf of the Association of Internet Researchers Ethics Working Committee, argue that ‘privacy is a concept that must include a consideration of expectations and consensus.’ Aside from the moral and political justification I have presented for covert methods in antiracist research – users’ expectations surrounding privacy on SF were a key determining factor in my ethical judgements.

Throughout my research, I have considered the expectations of privacy on SF, concluding that the space is largely agreed to be public. In their research on SF, De Koster and Houtman (2008, p.77) contend that, ‘The perceived privacy on the forum is very low: the users explicitly indicate they are aware that non-members with diverse backgrounds read the postings on the forum.’ As a result, De Koster and Houtman argue that they didn’t feel the need to gain consent for the use of members’ messages. As I show later in this thesis, a significant proportion of the circulating discourse on SF directly addresses unregistered observers or ‘lurkers’⁵⁰ – showing an acute awareness of the public nature of posts on open forum boards.

With this in mind, I follow De Koster and Houtman in eschewing the ‘standard’ ethical practice of gaining informed consent with the express aim of observing the more everyday interactions of Stormfront members’ interactions. The need to anonymise contributors to the Forum is also negated by the semi-anonymous nature of the medium and the ease with which archived text online may be found through standard search engines. Prescriptive ethical

⁵⁰ For example, in the wake of Dylann Roof’s attack, SF member @BoyHowdy posted: ‘to make it very clear for ZOG [the so-called Zionist Occupation Government] reading all this we do not advocate any illegal activity ever...’ and @sons of vengeance chipped in: ‘Greetings federal agents, As you can see we are not your enemy.’

frameworks are useful to a point, but I draw on Calvey (2008) to advocate a more flexible and situated ethics which runs through the whole project.

The standard ethics process is often so rigid that it becomes cumbersome and obscures the real ethical dilemmas faced by researchers. Acknowledging this, Calvey (2008, pp.908–9) posits that: ‘research is a situated business [...] it is in the particular cases of the here and now with participants that ethics are situationally accomplished [...] engagement with the ethics of research is not a ritualistic tick box process that once done at the beginning of a project can then be obviated, but runs throughout the lifetime of a project’. I have engaged with the ethics of the online research context throughout this project – making ethical judgements long after being granted approval by the School Ethics Committee. Perhaps more importantly, I have had to think reflexively about the ethics of my own antiracist approach. It is to this that I turn now.

Reflexive antiracist research

Instead of asking the common moral question: ‘Am I racist?’ and expecting a comfortable answer, the *white* subject should rather ask: ‘How can I dismantle my own racisms?’, as the question itself initiates that process (Kilomba 2013, p.22 italics in original)

Antiracist research involves negotiating ‘the politics of assimilating those who [espouse] racism into the realm of understanding’ (Back 2002b, p.34). No matter how tempting it is to paint a monstrous picture of the white nationalist – it is ultimately useless in the pursuit of antiracist knowledge. Indeed, Ezekiel (1995, p.xxxv) argues that ‘[to] present white racists as humans is not to approve their ideas or their actions. But to picture them only in stereotype is to foolishly deny ourselves knowledge.’ The key to effective antiracist action, he asserts, is ‘honest inquiry’ (p.xxxv). In an attempt to carry out such honest enquiry, I have made a conscious effort

to acknowledge the humanity of SF members, whilst profoundly and explicitly disagreeing with their views. In doing so, I have tried to critique the hegemonic ‘racial grammar’ which presents the white experience as universal (Bonilla-Silva 2012, p.4).

As Kilomba asserts above, racism is an insidious internalised structure which must be acknowledged and worked against. Acknowledging this internalisation, Frankenberg (2004, p.115) advocates recursive research that keeps coming back to the ‘mirage of an unmarked whiteness.’ Whilst WN whiteness is explicitly ‘marked’, I have tried at all times to maintain a reflexive awareness of *my own* ‘invisible’ whiteness, and the ‘knapsack’ of privileges that this confers (see, McIntosh 1990). When I encountered explicitly threatening racist discourse, or read about racist police violence, for example, I may have become angry or depressed, but I didn’t fear for my life. When I found analysing WN discourse emotionally exhausting, I was notionally able to return to the privileged ignorance of race, which is exclusive to *white* subjects (Dyer 1997).

In a reflexive moment, Daniels (2009b, p.205) considers the possibility that researching WN webspaces might drive interest and traffic to them, but asserts that she is ‘resigned to the fact that such collateral benefit to white supremacists is beyond [her] control.’ Furthermore, she hopes that the benefits of her research might outweigh such an outcome. In my own research, a similar concern has troubled me at times. Do I, by remediating SF comments, act as a node in their broadcast network? Do I give them legitimacy by deeming them worthy of study? I hope that, through careful analysis, this thesis highlights the problematic nature of such remediation and promotes a critical antiracist praxis.

My research is driven by antiracist political commitments, and, as such, I make no claim to objectivity.⁵¹ Indeed, I believe that striving for objectivity in research on racism is a form of symbolic violence – reasserting the power of the oppressor(s).⁵² Instead, I want my work to contribute to developing a more effective digitally-inflected antiracism which takes as its target the object and subjects of my empirical study.

This raises the question of the moral responsibilities of the researcher toward the researched. It is standard practice, it seems, for methods texts to encourage researchers to avoid harming their ‘participants.’ Alan Bryman (2004, p.510), for example, cites the BSA’s *Statement of Ethical Practice*, which encourages researchers to ‘anticipate, and to guard against, consequences for research participants which can be predicted to be harmful [... and] to consider carefully the possibility that the research experience may be a disturbing one.’ The principle behind this approach seems reasonable enough if applied to non-reactionary research subjects. However, in the context of antiracist work, researchers’ responsibilities become far less clear-cut. In this thesis, I interrogate enduring structures of racism with the express aim of putting a dent in the discursive power of SF.

Above, I argue that the progressive political ends vindicate the covert means by which I have gathered the empirical material for this thesis. Here, I draw on Spicker (2011), to advance a similar argument to justify the potential for SF members to be ‘disturbed’ as a result of my work.

⁵¹ This does not mean, however, that I am unable to present my work from strategic ‘speaking positions’ of relative objectivity to avoid claims of partiality and invalidity (see, Back & Solomos 1993; see also, Haraway 1988 on “situated knowledge”).

⁵² Nobel prize-winner Elie Weisel (1986, n.p.) argued in his acceptance speech that: ‘We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere.’

In politically engaged antiracist research, the researcher's responsibility need not be primarily to the researched. In fact, Spicker (2011, p.122- my emphasis) asserts that:

The general duties of researchers include beneficence – the promotion of welfare and the avoidance of harm and respect for persons. *Those duties apply not just to research participants* – those who knowingly take part in a study – but to research subjects, to third parties and potentially to wider social groups. There may be conflicting rights and interests. If a research participant is abusing the rights of another person, it is not necessarily the case that the researcher is bound to respect or protect the participant's position. *Research on issues like violence, drug dealing or sex abuse has to consider the rights of the victims, not just the perpetrators.*

The 'conscious partiality' (Mies 1993, p.68) which I have practised over the course of my PhD work, ethically disposes me toward the victims of racism rather than to the individual racists.⁵³

This chapter has outlined the methods deployed in the empirical research for this thesis. By sketching my methodological failures, I highlight the messiness of research and show how this PhD took its final shape. Through consideration of the ethics of covert research, I make a case for 'lurking as method', advocating the practice of a situated ethics. Ultimately, I argue that the antiracist researcher's responsibility should be to the victims of racism over and above the perpetrators. With this in mind, I now present three empirical chapters, which aim to critique and undermine SF's power. In the following chapter, I outline the geographies of connection and connectivity exploited by WNs. Here, I argue that understanding the Forum topologically, and more-than-digitally, might make for more effective antiracist responses.

⁵³ This is not to say that I have not considered the welfare of the SF members quoted here. See conclusion for a critical discussion of macho antiracism which takes pleasure in causing harm to individual racists.

Chapter 4. 'Nailing a million pamphlets to a million trees': Topologies and materialities of connection

Introduction

Thomas Paine nailed pamphlets to trees to spread his message urging Americans to fight for independence from King George's England. Think of a Stormfront post as akin to nailing a million pamphlets to a million trees at once. (@*Undermüdlisch*)

Use of the internet has been integral to white nationalist organizing over the past few decades, and Stormfront's founder Don Black has been a pivotal figure in this online growth. Having set up Stormfront as a website in 1995, in 1996 Black told the *Philadelphia Inquirer* that: 'The potential of the Net for organizations and movements such as ours is enormous [...] We're reaching tens of thousands of people who never before had access to our point of view' (quoted in Kim 2005). In the intervening decades, this figure has dramatically risen, and at the time of writing, SF has 308,000 registered members⁵⁴ and 2.2 million unique visitors per quarter.⁵⁵ In reality, the *active* membership is much smaller, with around 1500 members logging in each day, but this still represents an unprecedented extension of WN reach compared with previous reliance on pamphlets and flyers. Beyond SF, WNs are active to varying degrees on all social media platforms, and make extensive use of blogs to share and circulate knowledges.

⁵⁴ Source: Stormfront.

⁵⁵ Source: Google Analytics.

Such uptake in digital technology has not been without consequences, however.

According to Mark Potok (SPLC – personal interview), over the past two decades, there has been a slow but steady drift away from offline collective WN politics, such as organised Klan Chapters, towards a more individualised ‘online’ politics. I argue, that, somewhat paradoxically, this fragmentation has been paired with intensified potential for translocal connection. This has afforded WNs a sense of solidarity with a geographically dispersed network of ideological allies, extending topologically through this community of ‘collective feeling’.

In this Chapter, I draw on my long engagement with SF as well as the three case studies referred to already. I first discuss the materiality of so-called ‘cyberspaces’ to understand the importance of infrastructure, and the work that goes into structuring and maintaining this mode of communication. This approach allows me to highlight the entangled and mutually constitutive shuttling back and forth of ‘online’ and ‘offline’ lives and ‘spaces’. Here I join others (see Madge 2007; Kitchin & Dodge 2011) in turning away from binary understandings of the ‘virtual’ and the ‘real’ in order to get to grips with their imbrication. I argue, following recent scholarship in geography (Kinsley 2014), that cyberspaces have no ontic reality separate from the ‘real world’ *per se*. Instead, the technologies which are said to produce them augment physical and social space through potential for connection and distancing. They can be used to draw together disparate actors across a network. As Kinsley (2014, p.375) argues of text messaging, but equally applicable in the context of posting on web fora:

rather than being an ‘immaterial’ process, there is a significant network of matter and energy upon which this ‘virtual’ activity is predicated [...] For a moment, a body is composed with energetic and clearly material systems to record and convey meaning, however trivial, to an-other. Circuits of connection, energy transfer, cognition and meaning are composed between bodies, devices, infrastructure, data and others into a milieu that not only performs the action of sending a text message but changes the composition or states of the variously composed individuals involved.

The concept of cyberspace *qua* ‘cyber’ *space*, then, is found wanting, when infrastructural materiality is considered. As discussed above, this is not a radical perspective on so-called ‘cyberspace’ (see, Kinsley 2014; Ash et al. 2016; Boellstorff 2016), but it is an important corrective to the contemporary accounts which still rely on the concept.⁵⁶ As a starting point here, I suggest attention to the ‘more-than-digital’ geographies of so-called ‘cyberspace’.

This approach leads me to briefly explore the topological nature of ‘digital’ connections and the spatial imaginaries employed by SF users to make sense of these. In advocating for a focus not on proximity, but instead on connectibility Latour (1996, p.4) argues that: ‘elements which are close when disconnected may be infinitely remote if their connections are analyzed; conversely, elements which would appear as infinitely distant may be close when their connections are brought back into the picture’. Following Serres and Latour (1995), I argue that the potential for connection afforded by digital technologies has brought WNs closer together with ideological allies at greater distances. The importance of this connectibility can be seen in the challenge of racist organising in physical spaces and a digitally-inflected antiracist praxis must recognise this. The stigma attached to association with racist groups can be partly assuaged through relatively anonymous connections possible through the use of networked digital and social media. The ideological chasm between racists and anti-racists can be traversed or avoided.

Although I problematize the notion of cyberspace, it is clear that some form of imagined community exists, in the context of Stormfront, which transcends traditional territoriality, and it is to this aspect that I turn finally. This community is (re)formed daily through the maintenance of connections and the ‘mass ceremony’ (Anderson 2006, p.35) of shared outrage and fear

⁵⁶ See, for example, Manuel Castell’s (2013, p.2) recent work which details the organising of new social movements ‘[from] the safety of cyberspace’; or the title of a recent conference I attended in Brno, CZ, uncritically titled *Cyberspace 2015*.

surrounding racialized news stories. The same texts are read and discussed.⁵⁷ If the advent of print-capitalism precipitated the ‘remarkable confidence of community in anonymity’ (Anderson 2006, p.36), then the world wide web may be seen to have intensified these confidences whilst at the same time also intensifying fragmentation. In order to explain such solidarity in the case of SF, I examine the maintenance of WN solidarities, drawing on Ahmed’s (2004b; 2004a) work on ‘collective feelings’ and orientation, to argue that Forum members are aligned, in part, through a shared sense of *their* ‘righteous truth’ which, in turn, acts to position the ‘other.’⁵⁸ First, though, I examine the materialities, and vulnerabilities of ‘cyberspace’.

Materiality and topology

In this section, I examine and problematise the still prevalent popular notion of ‘cyberspace’ and the digital/physical binary it implies through a focus on the grounded materiality⁵⁹ of the ‘virtual’ and the vulnerabilities that this produces. I first examine some of the sites and moments where the apparently digital ‘touches down’, through telling the illustrative story of Stormfront Italia’s closure by Italian authorities, and the arrest and trial of the sub-

⁵⁷ I am thinking here particularly of the novels – *Hunter* and *The Turner Diaries* – written by National Alliance founder William Pierce, and canonical fascist texts, such as *Mein Kampf* by Adolf Hitler and *My Awakening* by former KKK Grand Wizard David Duke; but also, more recently, shorter form web-only texts, such as *The Ten Eternal Truths of White Nationalism* by Curt Dietrich.

⁵⁸ This is not to forget what Wolfe (2016, p.4) describes as the ‘traces of history’ which have produced the political, social, and economic structures of hegemonic whiteness, and, in contrast, ‘otherness’ (I discuss this more fully in chapter seven). Rather, my aim is to understand something of the individual motivations for membership in such groups, and what it is that binds them together.

⁵⁹ Here, I am aware of the problematic binary nature of the terminology of ‘grounding’ and materiality – as if set against the virtual ‘cloud’. However, I follow Anderson and Wiley (2009), in paying attention to the turbulent nature of complex materialities.

forum's moderators. This example is chosen because it condenses many of the fundamental themes of my argument into a relatively neat narrative, and was an important story on the Forum around the time that I started my engagement there. Here I examine the traces of life which shuttle back and forth between the digital and the physical, and the spatial imaginaries employed by WNs to understand these. I then move on to highlight the vulnerability of 'cyberspaces' through an examination of embodied practices of access and mobile interfacing.

Through exploring these cases, I argue that the 'cyberspace' upon which members rely, is actually a complex translocal assemblage⁶⁰ of software, hardware, bodies, feelings, politics, money, laws, and more (see McFarlane 2009). Understanding the forum as an assemblage allows me to move beyond reductive and unhelpful cyber/real binaries, and to examine the topological nature of connections and connectibility on SF. Whilst certain ontological applications of assemblage thinking have been accused of presenting a depoliticised obfuscation to transformative change (see Brenner et al. 2011 for critique in the context of urban assemblage theory), I want to use the concept in its descriptive capacity to account for the tangled nature of Stormfront's ongoing reproduction. In this sense, understanding SF, and the wider WN movement as an assemblage, rather than being depoliticising, identifies cracks to be exploited by a digitally-inflected anti-racist politics. In order to take advantage of such vulnerabilities, I suggest widening the focus of geographies of 'virtual communities' to account for the 'more-than-digital'.

⁶⁰ Dittmer (2013, p.3) follows DeLanda in describing assemblages as wholes characterized by relations of exteriority where, 'component parts of a whole cannot be reduced to their function within that whole, and indeed they can be parts of multiple wholes at any given moment.' Importantly, he goes on to argue that, '[the] parts are nevertheless shaped by their interactions within assemblages, and indeed it is the **capacities**, rather than the **properties**, of component parts that are most relevant in understanding resultant assemblages.'

Whilst I argue that ‘cyberspace’ is vulnerable to technological and human challenges, I want to show that the ‘virtual’ and ‘physical’ are imbricated in an ongoing process of mutual constitution. To do this, I first explore the circulating traces of online and offline life through the story of SF Italia.

When ‘cyberspace’ ‘Touches Down’ – Stormfront Italia

You've got the digital social space and 'IRL', you know, in real life. And they exist on directly parallel planes, moving at the same speed, but they don't always touch. [...] the problems for the racist right are where those spaces hit, you know, when IRL becomes what they've done online. (Ryan Lenz – SPLC – personal interview)

On Friday November 16 2012, Italian police carried out coordinated raids at 17 properties across the country, unearthing neo-Nazi and fascist propaganda and arresting four white nationalists. Those arrested were targeted because of their involvement in the moderation of Stormfront Italia – a national sub-forum of SF – where they were alleged to have drawn up a ‘blacklist’ of pro-immigration public figures (Gazzetta del Sud 2012). News spread quickly to SF’s main forum where a regular contributor to SF Italia posted a short article in the Newslinks forum, with the caption ‘THREE OF THE ARRESTS ARE ALL THE THREE MODS OF THE ITALIAN SECTION... I’LL UPDATE THE THREAD, AS I KNOW BETTER THE SITUATION!’ (@*Legionario88*)⁶¹.

⁶¹ @ *Legionario88* later revealed that he had managed to log in and post through a proxy server, since the forum had been blocked in Italy.

Messages of support for those arrested began to filter in, and anger grew over the perceived assault on free speech.⁶² For example, *@RuleBritannia* argued that, since SF is a WN site, the charge of incitement to racial hatred was erroneously applied:

Outrageous. Especially when it is OUR site. It's not like they [the arrested moderators] went to other sites spreading 'racist hatred'. I highly doubt ANY non-whites saw ANY of the posts made by these Italians. So how is it 'inciting racial hatred'? Free speech is dead. (*@RuleBritannia*)

@RuleBritannia's level of comprehension of racial hate laws aside, this argument seeks to position SF as a discrete, and therefore 'protected', discursive space. This formulation shows a strong sense of betrayal – it is implied, I contend, that the relatively contained and bounded discourse of SF serves as a tacit compromise with the state.

Further anger was directed at the legal jurisdiction of the arrests:

Stormfront is an American site, not an Italian site (*@Great Australian Bite*)

All twenty-one accounts have been temporarily disabled.

However, no one has tried to access any of the accounts since the 15th. Perhaps the Italian police criminals realize that any such attempted break-in would be a criminal offense *in this country*. (*@Don Black*)

In both of these examples, the materiality of website hosting is invoked in an attempt to undermine Italian police. The fact that the site is registered and hosted on servers in the USA – where the first amendment enshrines free speech in law – is held as evidence of the inviolability of all users' rights. That the site, *is* hosted in the US, but draws just under half its membership

⁶² Levels of interest were far lower, however, than they perhaps would have been had this closure been attempted in the US context. Whilst this has to do with the first amendment and the constitutional challenge to such arrests, I think it also points toward a US-centrism.

from across Europe, Australia, and South Africa, is in part evidence of the legal necessity for WN sites to be ‘rooted’ in certain sympathetic jurisdictions. A similar site hosted in the UK, for example, would be closed down for incitement to racial hatred. Through this arrangement, the materiality of so-called ‘cyberspace’ is exposed.

Two days after the arrests, @Legionario88 posted a brief update:

Our 4 Brothers will be probably processed tomorrow by the italian fake-democratic state. It is currently maintained absolute silence on time and courtroom. As soon as I have more details, I won't hesitate to communicate! I'm unfortunately pessimist about their realease from jail. But I hope the best for them. - Luca Ciampaglia(nickname - Antilife - MY FRIEND IN REAL LIFE) , Daniele Scarpito(nickname - Dani) , Mirko Viola(nickname - Biomirko) , Diego Masi (nickname - NonConforme) -and the other 17 italian users investigated! NEVER SURRENDER!!!

In identifying the arrested men, @Legionario88 connects them to their SF usernames. This practice immediately grounds the ‘reality’ of pseudonymous avatars in the corporeal, highlighting the potential fragility of such constructs. The parenthetic qualifier attached to Luca Ciampaglia’s name – and its capitalisation – I believe, shows a privileging of ‘irl’ relationships, which further undermines the utopianism of ‘cyberspace’. Soon after this update, in an act of solidarity, @Legionario88 posted their own details online:

I won't leave my brothers alone in jail! I posted my full name and address on the italian section! Come to get me democRATS! (@Legionario88)

The shuttling back and forth of the online/offline context and signifiers in @Legionario88’s comments say much about the imbrication of the Forum into the everyday life and practice of users. These digital traces of ‘offline’ life permeate the Forum reminding members that this is but one sphere, or milieu, in which they are situated and in which their discourse circulates. The spatial imaginaries deployed in @Legionario88’s highlight the connections between online and offline space, but maintain their separation.

Shortly after the arrests, Italian police prevented access to SF by forcing nearly one hundred internet service providers to block the URL (Pasqua 2012) – providing further evidence of the vulnerability of ‘cyberspace’ to ‘rooted’, ‘local’, intervention. This denial of legal access, as well as the growing concern for Italian activists’ freedom, prompted members outside Italy to offer advice on staying active on the Forum:

If it's illegal to participate in Stormfront (or any website which advocates your opinions on the continuation of the white race) where you live, please do not be complacent and just use a proxy. (@*exnihil*)

If you use a proxy (as I'm doing), there are no problems. Is just a little annoying. Judamn. 😊 (@*West is best*)

The use of proxies tells another interesting story about the materiality of ‘cyberspace’. The manipulation of digital infrastructure is required to maintain access – pragmatically routing connections through (and, to a degree, ephemerally rooting them *in*) sympathetic or neutral spaces.

Realising the danger to SF users of ISP cooperation with the authorities, @*Olympus* urged further caution through a reordering of members’ spatial practices of connection:

Actually, there is a better way to stay anonymous while being on-line..... You can access the internet via a wifi hotspot. 😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊 (@*Olympus*)

Whilst @*Olympus*’ suggestion was met with broad agreement, @ *AnAverageJoe* was keen to offer advice:

From someone with experience with wifi hotspots, some notes:

* Anyone else on the network (also connected to the hotspot) can directly access your computer. Have a good firewall. It also helps to change your ‘hostname’ on your computer to something not so revealing. Most ‘hostnames’ are pretty revealing. As well, there was (maybe still is, haven’t check it out in a long time) a way to hijack sessions on a local network. Someone could steal the cookie of your logged in session and then get access to that session. Imagine how bad it would be for someone to get full access to your stormfront or email account.

[...]

* Keep in mind there are cameras at virtually all businesses. If you are the only one connected to the hotspot and they see you on camera with a computer, pretty easy to say you were the one who 'did it'. Many hotspots can be accessed from the parking lot of the business. With a good wireless card, you can even access it from maybe 100 or more feet away. (@AnAverageJoe)

Here, @Olympus and @AnAverageJoe's comments support Dodge and Kitchin's (2011) theory of 'code/space'. In their work, Dodge and Kitchin argue that:

Software [...] modulates how space comes into being through a process of transduction (the constant making anew of a domain in reiterative and transformative practices). Space from this perspective is an event or a doing [...] rather than a container or a plane or a predetermined social production that is ontologically fixed. (p.16)

Following this definition of code/space, it is clear that the coded nature of WN communications through SF, as well as the coded legal response via ISPs, (re)produces spaces of WN politics in ways which are entirely reliant on both the corporeal and the digital. The ability to avoid detection online through the use of a public WiFi hotspot, for example, is undermined by the need to travel to spaces which may deploy other forms of surveillance. In this way, WNs in Italy during this period found their activities and movements constrained by the limits of the digital medium and the integration of illicit communicative circuits into their everyday life.

The spatiality of Italian members' experience takes on a particular relevance when brought into international context. The first amendment right to freedom of speech and expression in the USA has made it something of a 'virtual' haven for WNs around the world in recent decades (Foxman & Wolf 2013). Most European states, for example, have hate speech and/or incitement laws such as those invoked in the Italian case. These laws often prohibit the creation or hosting of 'hate' sites, leaving European racists little choice but to join American communities such as SF, where national sub-fora provide the closest equivalent to 'local' digital organising. However, the balkanized organisation of SF into 'national' discussion spaces seems

to undermine the WN exhortation that ‘our race is our nation’, and shows the partialness of the internet’s transcendent potential.

Becoming a moderator of one of these sub-fora comes with additional risk. Following the arrests of the three SF Italia moderators, members were concerned to see some form of order resumed:

The main problem of Stormfront Italia is currently the lack of mods, more than the lack of users in my opinion. (@FuriusCamillus)

In response to these anxieties @Jack Boot (‘Editor and Stormfront Chief of Staff’) posted a brief explanation:

I've tapped two members [to be moderators] so far and both have declined - understandably, since they live in Italy.

I remember some years ago introducing a mod selection guideline requiring all mods to be Americans, for mostly this reason. It was unworkable though. I was mainly worried about the Brits. Nick Griffin was facing charges at that time for criticizing Muslims. (@Jack Boot)

The decision, however unsuccessful and abortive, to implement an American-only moderator policy speaks volumes about the spatio-legal elements of the SF assemblage. The Forum relies heavily on moderators to keep the space running smoothly; they constitute one indispensable moving part of many. The simultaneous loss of all three – along with the URL block and the police investigation of a number of members – in the case of SF Italia meant that the sub-forum ceased to function properly. In this case, the assemblage was transformed in disruptive ways which undermined its smooth-running. @Jack Boot’s failed policy was, in part, an attempt to maintain the smooth running of the Forum by taking advantage of the first amendment rights of American moderators. In this way, the supposed ‘self-fashion[ing] and self-creat[ion]’, described by Turkle (1995, p.177) as occurring somewhere ‘on the *other* [read virtual] side of the looking glass’, are dragged back to the corporeal side.

A similar acknowledgement of the spatiality of the socio-legal is displayed by *@Don Black* when asked on the SF Italia arrests thread why such action had not yet happened in Germany, where hate laws are stricter – for obvious reasons – than in Italy:

I saw this coming with the [‘Stormfront auf Deutsch’ forum](#)⁶³. So I closed it in 2002. Otherwise, we'd have seen the same thing in Germany a long time ago [...] Freedom of speech here in the U.S. is still, for the time being, not only legal, but constitutionally protected. Not so in other countries in the ‘free world.’ (*@Don Black*)

In this decision, *@Don Black* shows an understanding in practice of the permeability of the digital and ‘real’ – a position he has maintained since the inception of SF, consistently warning less careful users that their communications could be traced back to them.

Topology and circulation

Six months after their arrest, when the four men had been tried and imprisoned, SF moderator *@revision* encouraged members to send (snail)mail to them. In the post (see Figure 4), *@Revision* gave the moderators’ prison addresses along with their names and SF ‘nicknames’ or screen names⁶⁴. Interestingly, whilst a number of members publicly took up the suggestion, a small contingent articulated concerns which bore a striking similarity to those voiced about web access to the Forum following the arrests.

⁶³ Hyperlink to locked and inactive German language page.

⁶⁴ Here, ‘online’ and ‘offline’ identities are fused.



Figure 4 Letter writing (Source: Stormfront)

In the discussion shown in Figure 5, familiar tropes regarding the preservation of anonymity show that the challenges of WN communications are not unique to the digital medium.

The reticence of some members to post physical letters for fear of reprisal is telling. In an age of near-instant communication, a sense that CMC is somehow more anonymous than more tangible forms of communication seems pervasive, despite high-profile news of phone-hacking and government surveillance (see, Perloth et al. 2013). In this sense, *@HardHawk's* warning that 'may be [it] is not the most intelligent act right now to connect your self and this forum with them [the arrested men]' is somewhat short-sighted, given that these connections already exist. This is, however, an interesting example of a topological spatial imaginary of anonymous connection deployed by WNs.

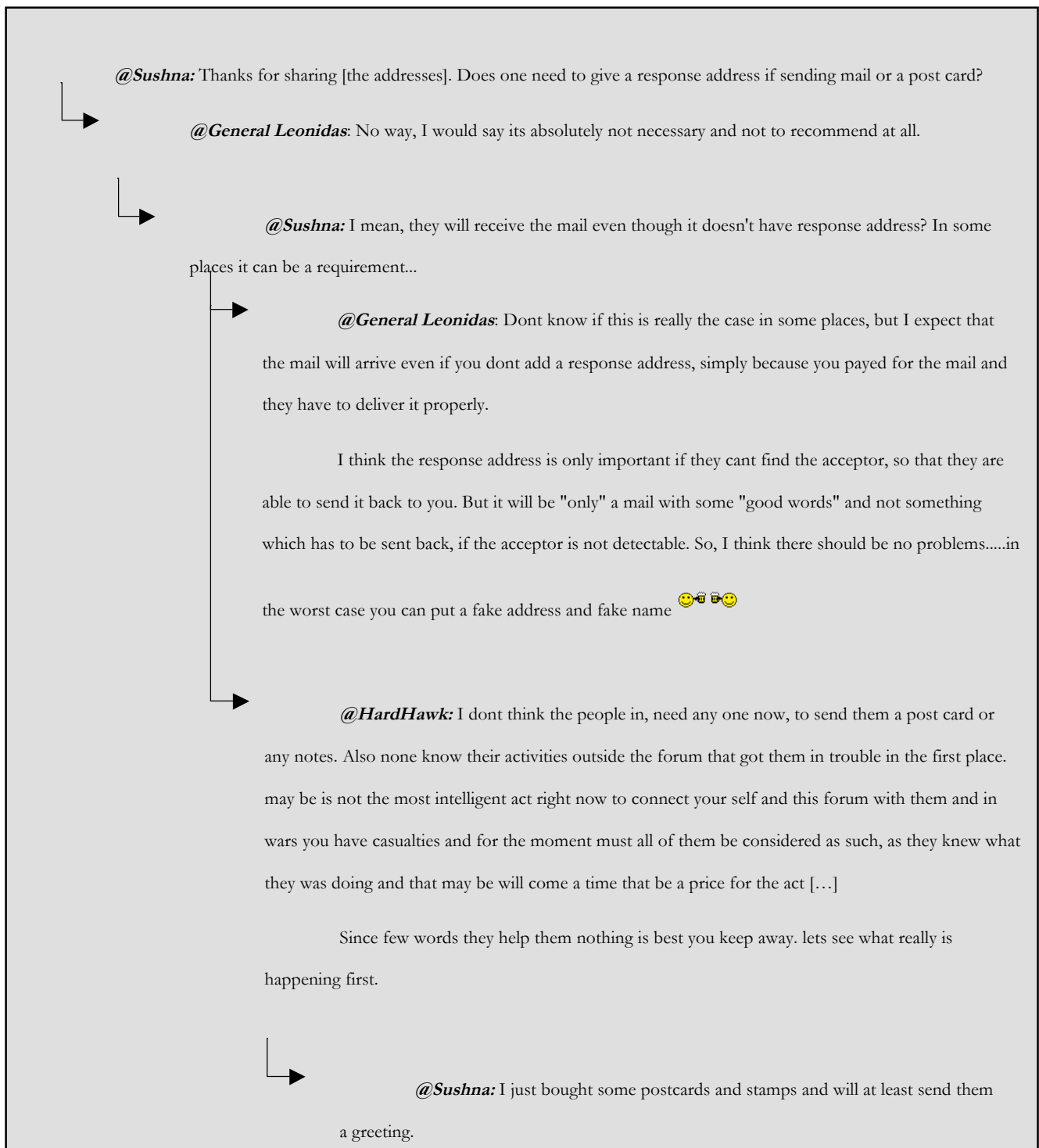


Figure 5- Discussion on letter-writing (source: Stormfront)

A month or so after the letter writing campaign, a letter of response from one of the arrested men – Mirko Viola – via his lawyer, was posted on SF by @Legionario88 (see Figure 6).

CARCERE DI S.VITTORE
"GIOVEDÌ" 14 DICEMBRE 2012

GENTILISSIMO AVV. LONGI
GRAZIE MILLE PER LA SOLIDARIETÀ... MI HA FATTO DAVERO UN
IMMENSO PIACERE.
E DA 30 GIORNI CHE SONO RINCHIUSO IN UNA CELLA DI 4X3 METRI,
DODICI METRI QUADRATI DA CONDIVIDERE CON ALTRI CINQUE DISGRAZIATI
PER 23 ORE AL GIORNO.
IL MIO REATO? AVER "INFESTIDITO" UNA NOIA LOBBY CHE ENTRAMBI
CONOSCIAMO MOLTO BENE... HO SCRITTO SU UN FORUM, NON HO MAI
MINACCIATO, PROGRAMMATO STERMINI O ALTRE NEFANDIEZZE, MA
CREDO DI AVER MANDATO SU TUTTE LE FURIE "LORSIGNORI" E L'HO
FATTO CON LA MASSIMA GIOIA: UN CRIMINE SBUGIARDARE UN BRANCO
DI FALSARI? A QUANTO PARE LO È... MA IO HO LA COSCIENZA
PULITA... CRISTACCINA!!!
C'È UN MURO DI GOMMA KOSHER CHE RESPINGE QUALSIASI ISTANZA.
I MIEI IDEALI, I MIEI CAMERATI, LA MIA FAMIGLIA, GLI AMICI E TUTTA LA
GENTE LIBERA CHE MI SCRIVE, ALCEVIANO IN PARTE QUESTA
SOSTERENZA... LA RABBIA MI MANTIENE IN FORMA (MI ALICENO QUOTIDIANI-
MENTE USANDO LA BRANDA PER FARE TRAZIONI E IL PAVIMENTO DELLA
CELLA PER INFINITE SERIE DI FLESSIONI)... CERCO DI LEGGERE TUTTO
QUELLO CHE CAPITA E DI RESTARE LUCIDO: NON SARÀ UNA GALERA A
PIEGARMI, DI QUESTO NE SONO CERTO.
IN FACCIA A QUESTO MONDO VILE, A QUESTA GENIE SENZA ONORE,
A QUESTI PATEFICI OMUNCOLI, VORREI URLARE SOLO CINQUE
PAROLE: CONTRO DI VOI, NESSUNA RESA!!!
GRAZIE ANCORA PER LA SOLIDARIETÀ...
UN ABBRACCIO FRATERNO...

Figure 6 - Letter from Mirko Viola - Source: <http://4.bp.blogspot.com/->

11urpKOW44o/UPbdRrVuZII/AAAAAAAAABfQ/qEe1utbIvII/s1600/a.jpg----

The letter read:⁶⁵

Prison of San Vittore, Thursday 14 December 2012.

Dear Lawyer Longo, thank you for your solidarity... it was a great pleasure. It's 30 days that i'm confined on a cell of 4x3 meters, 12 square meters shared with other 5 unfortunates for 23 hours a day. My Crime? Having ' bothered ' an evident lobby that both of us know very well... I wrote on a web forum, I never threatened anyone, I never planned genocides, or other atrocities, but i think i have infuriated them enormously, and I did it with a great joy: is it a crime to expose a gang of liars? probably yes... but my conscience is clear... immaculate!!! There's a rubber kosher wall that rejects every instance. My ideals, my comrades, my family, my friends and all the free people who writes to me, they partly relieve this pain... my wrath keeps me fit (I use to train my body every day using the cot to do tractions and the floor of the cell to do flexures)... I try to read everything that come to my eyes, and I try to stay always awake: it won't be a prison that will defeat me, i'm pretty sure about this. In face of this vile world, in face of these people without honor, in face of these pathetic runts, i want to scream only five words: AGAINST YOU,

⁶⁵ As translated by @Legionario88

NEVER SURRENDER!!! Again, thank you for your solidarity... brotherlike greetings... Mirko Viola. (translation posted by @Legionario88)

A month after his arrest, Viola was communicating with SF again, though now mediated by pen and paper, the prison guards, the Italian postal service, the lawyer, a scanner, and the translator. But, he was connected.

The corporeal confines of the cell were not enough to undermine the connectibility of SF's network. Through judicious phrasing⁶⁶ and the use of a proxy (in this case his lawyer), Viola was able to extend his reach beyond the restricted space of the prison into the disparate-but-connected spaces of WN circulation. As Kinsley (2014, p.378) asserts, '[it is important] to conduct work that attends to the manifold ways in which technical activities convene assemblages of bodies, objects, feelings, language, values and so on, and fold them in and out of spatial practices.'

In this example, the digital medium and its infrastructure are shown only to partially constitute the 'cyber space', whilst the embodied practice of writing, prison censorship, the postal service, mediation through 'Lawyer Longo', and feelings of connection and comradeship all come to play a part in the (re)production of the 'cyberspace' of SF. On one hand, the necessity to communicate through this material format shows the vulnerability of Stormfront – as a translocal assemblage – to ruptures in its constituent parts through the plugging in of policing practices. On the other hand, the publication of the letter in the appropriate thread, despite the member's lack of access to a computer, highlights the Forum's rhizomatic flexibility

⁶⁶ Viola's use of the phrase 'an evident lobby that both of us know very well' in place of any reference to the so-called ZOG bears ironic resemblance to the convoluted linguistic contortions employed by Gramsci (1971) to evade censorship by prison guards under Mussolini.

and reasserts the existence of the network beyond the web protocols, cables, interfaces, code, and computers.

The example presented above demonstrates something of the topological nature of SF connections. Here, I want to invoke Serre and Latour's (1995, p.60) explanatory analogy of the crumpled handkerchief – outlined in Chapter Two – which uses the scrunching and folding of cloth to describe the 'nearness and rifts' of topology as opposed to the '[metrical geometry's] well-defined distances.' In terms of metrical geometry, Mirko Viola's jail cell is impossibly far removed from the members of SF – many thousands of miles across the Atlantic (for most), and behind seemingly impenetrable walls. Topologically, however, I argue that Viola's cell and, through the embodied practice of writing, his body, are articulated into the lives and spaces of the WN milieu. In this instance, the handkerchief is crumpled so that points which at one point seemed distant and isolated – Viola's cell and countless readers' everyday spaces – are superimposed, becoming accessible and readable. Importantly, this shows that the web is a conduit for particular forms of communication, but it is not necessarily novel, and it is far from discrete and contained.

I argue, therefore, that 'cyberspace', as it is currently theorised, relies on a problematic digital-techno-centrism which undermines the complexity of embodied and everyday practices which (re)produce spatial imaginaries and topological networks of connectivity. Instead of cyberspace as a purely 'web' scape – a network of individuals brought into *digital* connection – I want to argue for an expanded conceptualisation of the term which incorporates *all* relationships produced through mediated communication – digital or otherwise, which exist beyond co-presence.

Here, I argue for attention to the 'more-than-digital geographies' of the internet and the communities which rely upon it. This approach acknowledges the relatively novel spatialities of

digitally mediated communication, whilst attending to the plethora of non-digital technologies and processes which are employed in the making and re-making of what have until now been somewhat reductively described as ‘digital geographies’ (see, Ash et al. 2016). Understanding WN networks as more-than-digital is of great importance, because it emphasises the need for antiracist approaches which avoid reductive and potentially counter-productive strategies.

Practices and processes of meaning making shuttle back and forth between digital and physical spaces, which have become so imbricated that the distinction often seems arbitrary. Lives are lived between and through such spaces, in a constant relationship of co-constitution. I discuss the lived and embodied experience of connection and circulation further in the next section on interface and mobile internet use.

Following the shooting in Charleston, for example, *@WhiteandProudInOhio* headed straight out to the local supermarket and stocked up on ammunition.

I went to the 24 hour Walmart bought about 800\$ in ammo as soon as I heard about this [...] The lady in sporting goods ask why I was buying so much ammunition that time of night and I told her there going to be another gun grab. She told me she was happy she worked in the evening because people were lined up in the morning to buy out the ammo after Sandy hook.

This embodied and everyday ‘offline’ activity was then folded back into the ‘digital’ narrative, leaving online traces of *@WhiteandProudInOhio*’s offline practices to be deciphered and digested by other members. The same process is discernible in reverse, where online traces bear offline consequences. *@WDinTN*, notes this in the case of Dylann Roof:

Based on some of the shooter's online history, this is going to hurt us, and likely hurt us quite badly.

The traces of Roof’s online activity connected him to a number of far and extreme right organisations and sites (notably *not* SF). Furthermore, his shooting spree was underlined by a

manifesto which he posted on his personal web page. In his manifesto, Roof (2015) traced his 'racial awakening' to the Trayvon Martin case. He had spent a lot of time on the Council for Conservative Citizenship (CCC) web page, and he credited this site and its 'pages upon pages of [...] brutal black on White murders' for heightening his racial awareness. The move from online information gathering to offline violent action seemed logical to Roof, who had by that point assimilated the virulently racist perspectives and provocations which he had exposed himself to. Furthermore, he lamented a lack of offline action: 'We have no skinheads, no real KKK, no one doing anything but talking on the internet. Well someone has to have the bravery to take it to the real world, and I guess that has to be me' (Roof 2015 n.p.). Here Roof treats the act of 'talking on the internet' with disdain, as somehow less 'real' than the violent actions he would later take in the 'real world', but in this analysis he misses the fact that all the internet talk was a crucial factor in his own awakening and physical action. Indeed, Heidi Beirich (2014b, p.2), of the SPLC, links SF to 100 murders in the five years between 2009-2014, starkly highlighting the often-brutal connection between 'online' talk and 'offline' action.

Whilst the web has provided WNs with opportunities to extend their reach and create new connections, there exists a seemingly strict hierarchy between online and offline activists. SF users often deploy confused and contradictory spatial imaginaries. For example, whilst the digital medium is seen as a space of relatively anonymous identity construction, members often show frustration toward 'clicktivists' or 'slacktivists' (see Morozov 2012) – those whose only political activity is carried out online. In oppositional social movements, such as Stormfront, these members are dubbed 'keyboard warriors', and stand accused of *only* participating online. Whilst social media is hailed as a breakthrough for WNs, many members argue for the importance of offline activism:

It is time to act! No more keyboard warrior crap! I'm going to place stickers and flyers all over my neighborhood tomorrow before I go to work. I don't

care what you do, as long as it isn't illegal...but GO DO SOMETHING!!!
(@MyKidRawks – emphasis added)

It is clear, particularly in moments of quarrel, that much of members' legitimacy of opinion and input on SF seems to hinge upon their 'real life' activism. For example, shrugging off a vague allegation by @Lizardman, @WhiteMansBurden82 draws on evidence of face-to-face meetings with other SF members as proof of authenticity:

[I] get a good laugh out of your insinuation that I'm some sort of online saboteur, lol. It not only shows how paranoid and delusional you are, it also implies that you don't have much of a life. And why is it you Muslim apologist types are almost always the ones who go around accusing people who disagree with as being 'trolls'? I might not like your posts, but I'm still not stupid enough to think that you're some sort of paid agitator. At any rate, more than a few people on this site have met me in person, and I've been to many WN Community events over the years. (@WhiteMansBurden82)

@WhiteMansBurden82's reliance on physical meetings with fellow WNs makes explicit a hierarchy which is often implicit, those who are active 'offline' can claim greater credibility than those whose actions end with participation on the forum. As @Don Black reiterates on a regular basis:

'Some of us [...] must stand behind our words in the real world with our real names' (@Don Black)

Never is this more acute than during periods of ontological and ideological insecurity, such as those displayed in the case studies I cover in this thesis. Importantly, however, the perception of relative anonymity is one of the strengths of computer mediated communication for WNs.

Anonymity

When Turkle published *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* in 1995, she based her hypotheses on empirical engagement with users of multi-user domains (MUDs).⁶⁷ In these

⁶⁷ MUDs are a form of text-based virtual fantasy world, often incorporating a strong focus on role-play.

sites, members constructed explicitly fantastical identities, leading Turkle (1995, p.177) to argue that:

when we step through the screen into virtual communities, we reconstruct our identities on the other side of the looking glass. This reconstruction is our cultural work in progress [...] The internet has become a significant social laboratory for experimenting with the constructions and reconstructions of self that characterize post modern life. In its virtual reality, we self-fashion and self-create.

Whilst I take exception to the universal 'we', it is the metaphor of stepping through the screen, beyond into some virtual reality which is most jarring, given my discussion of the 'cyber' above.

The reification of the virtual/real binary also has consequences for the way in which anonymity is understood online. The implied chameleonic quality of bodies and identities online – epitomised by Peter Steiner's (1993) famous adage that 'on the internet, nobody knows you're a dog' – has been proven problematic. Indeed, Kennedy (2006, p.870) argues that: 'the concept of anonymity is more complex than it seems at first glance – there is a distinction between feeling and being anonymous, and there are degrees of anonymity which are varied and situated.' However, such a sense of anonymity and virtuality is embraced and deployed by WNs on SF. Following the identification of Glenn Miller as the shooter in Kansas City, SF was buzzing with declamatory statements highlighting Miller's ban from the Forum (see for example Figure 7).

Following *@WhiteMansBurden82*'s claim that Breivik and Miller were banned from the forum, *@Qwerks* suggests – perhaps somewhat tongue in cheek – that SF moderators might be able to support law enforcement by flagging up potentially dangerous members early. This proposition was met by two lines of critique – each of which hinged on particular performances of anonymity on SF. The first, put forward by *@BellaTNRx*, was that *any* direct personal engagement with the forum – waiving anonymity – would imply a degree of suspicious intent.

@Robert Ransdell: He was banned on this forum am I right, that happened years ago, again not for sure about that I am asking, seem to have heard he was banned from SF.

@JarlHildof: Yes he was banned from Stormfront in 2005!

@WhiteMansBurden82: Anders Breivik was banned from Stormfront back in late 2006/early 2007(after being here for roughly a month). It's pretty pathetic how the mainstream media tries to deceptively connect these guys with WN, when most reputable White Nationalist sites(including this one) tend to permanently ban them in less than a month's period of time.

@Qwerks: Seems like the authorities should be asking SF admin for help in identifying crazy people before they do things like this. Pretty good record.

@BellaTNRx: Last thing we want is authorities "talking" to admins here--it will be a witch hunt, starting with those who make contributions who the authorities will suspect more because they're willing to take some action and not just type anonymously

@WhiteMansBurden82: Since I didn't register here until the summer of 2006, I'm not familiar with Glen Miller's alias, or any of his posts. However, I do recall that Breivik was banned because of the ideological content of his posts(i.e. - his pro-Jewish/Israel stances), rather than for anything he wrote that might alert the mods/admins to his extremely violent personality.

Many people with sociopathic tendencies can successfully hide their true personalities in "real life", so hiding them on an online message board would be a cakewalk compared to that.

Figure 7 – Discussion on anonymity (source: Stormfront)

This hypothesis is supported by Wojcieszak (2010), who argues that making the step from lurking to involvement in such fora tends to increase active political participation and exacerbate an individual's latent extremism. The second critique draws on the affordances for anonymity of virtuality.

@*WhiteMansBurden82* attempts to absolve the moderators and members of SF of any responsibility by reference to the potential for duplicitous 'passing' online (Ahmed 1999; Nakamura 2013).⁶⁸ Here, @*WhiteMansBurden82* alludes to the ease with which the normativities of SF may be affected. Stormfront, then, is not a 'space' of guaranteed anonymity. Importantly, however, the forum gives members a sense of freedom which is often lacking outside of SF. Concern over anonymity in offline contexts was apparent in discussion surrounding setting up 'TRL' networks to protect white people from the 'black mob' following Ferguson:

There are 2 or 3 other SF members in my area. I've never met them, any attempts to set up anything are completely ignored. I've offered to meet at my farm, their places, in town on 'neutral ground', at a restaurant, wherever and... all I get is silence [...]

I have to tread very lightly in my area. If I get 'outed', we as a group stand to lose a facility that we are working very hard to turn into a place for folks to learn how to be White again. (@*WDinTN*)

→ In today's world one has to be careful in the real world. It definitely isn't like Mayberry out there anymore. Now days one has to worry about whites and nonwhites alike, it truly is a Mad Max type world now days. (@*woden29*)

The Forum, in this context, becomes a meeting place for WNs where they can be less guarded. In this 'space' the ideological chasm between racists and anti-racists is traversed or avoided through topological connection to a dispersed community of 'collective feelings'. I discuss this solidarity more fully below.

⁶⁸ Importantly, as Baym (2002) shows, identity play and deception are far rarer than anticipated by the digital utopians of the early 1990s.

Whilst this section has presented a story of topological connection and a technological overcoming of space and proximity, I want to problematize the notion that ‘cyberspace’ – whether understood ‘digitally’ or ‘more-than-digitally’ – is characterised by unfettered flows. To this end, I now briefly highlight one example of the vulnerability of ‘cyberspace’ by exploring the embodied experience of mobile browsing, and the points where flows can become stuck.

Interface, (mobil)ity, embodied experience, and the vulnerability of ‘cyberspace’

Relatively recent advances in smartphone technology have put powerful computers in many people’s pockets. Adult smartphone ownership currently stands at 64% in the U.S. – up 35% from 2011 (Smith & Page 2015, p.2) – whilst the figure is 66% in the UK (Ofcom 2015). This has significantly changed the way that much of the population accesses the internet, with the majority now accessing the web through mobile devices (Hern 2015). In the ‘always on’ smart phone age, the idea of ‘going online’ seems archaic and anachronistic (Baron 2008). However, the foundation of ‘always on’ is ‘always available’, and this has required a technological shift.

With this in mind, many websites and social media platforms now have optimised versions for mobile display. Not so Stormfront. The mobile experience is poorly laid out and awkward – still optimised solely for the larger screen of desktops and laptops. I want to argue here that this lack of usability highlights the vulnerability of ‘cyberspaces’. It does so by representing a collapse of the spatial imaginary of omnipresence, which is so important in the construction and maintenance of online communities.

Mobile access is an ongoing issue for the forum and many threads have been started by members in the ‘Suggestions for this board’ sub-forum calling for apps and mobile versions of

the site to be developed. As far back as 2007, *@World Wide White* suggested a mobile version of the Forum, arguing that: ‘It would be great to read and post even [when] not near a computer’. This post stimulated a number of responses suggesting work-arounds, but no action from moderators or *@Don Black*. In 2009 *@Joseph de Maistre* started another thread titled ‘Mobile Stormfront Format?’, posting:

I just recently bought a Blackberry and I want to be able to read SF on a more accessible format. Any chance that is possible?

This was supported by *@Pagan22*, who posted:

I also have a BlackBerry and would love to see SF move on up and go mobile. I can't access SF from work due to our firewall and I would like to be able to keep up with the news. I think it's in SF's best interests to go mobile.

@Pagan22's lack of access to SF at work – and the potential solution that mobile access provides – highlights the banal vulnerabilities of the translocal assemblage which constitutes the Forum (see McFarlane 2009), and the daily work which must be done to maintain connections.

More recently, calls for mobile optimisation have highlighted the ‘woefully outdated’ software on which the site runs (*@DomesticTerror*) and how hard the site is to use on a mobile (*@HtmIintim*). *@Michael Jeffrey* explained that because of the mobile experience: ‘[he] lurk[s] SF on [his] mobile, [he] only post from [his] desk top’, and *@MisanthroPunk* exclaimed: ‘Think about how great it would be to post from out in the world!’ Again, the vulnerability of SF to breakdowns in its constituent parts is highlighted here. Whilst the network and the infrastructure for connection may exist, the challenges of the software’s mobile interface threaten the Forum’s user base by presenting a frustrating embodied experience. The topological connectibility is undermined at the first hurdle. The utopian and omnipresent notion of cyberspace begins to collapse when access is impeded.

Realising that mobile internet accounted for a third of logins, @Don Black finally responded to optimisation requests. In tackling the issue, Black started a new thread calling for technically minded members to assist in making the Forum more accessible to mobile users:

I need to make Stormfront more mobile friendly soon. According to Google Analytics today, 31.5% of our visitors use a mobile device. That's up 1-1/2% since I last checked a few weeks ago. Google search also complained this morning about our mobile unfriendliness, saying that would affect search ranking. I had tried to add one quick fix a few months ago, 'portalview' for mobile users. Google liked it, significantly raising their automated mobile friendliness score for our site. But our human users complained, so I removed it.

This response highlights a key tension in the maintenance of the SF assemblage – that between technological and human metrics of success. Whilst technology and the human are mutually constituted, they do not always work in harmony. For example, in this case, the algorithmic metrics of Google's search ranking are not able to account for the embodied and affective experience of SF users. Here, Latour's (2005, p.77) attention to non-humans as *bona-fide* social actants is illuminating in understanding the transformation or failure of the SF assemblage.

Whilst the Forum's current format has a negative impact on search ranking, more search-friendly mobile alternatives have proved unpopular with members. Such tensions must be managed, and the site ordered and structured accordingly, to maintain SF as a popular and useful channel of WN communications. However, having outlined a number of alternative software platforms on which the Forum could notionally run, Black ultimately advocated against a shift:

We currently run 30 [software-specific] add-ons and hundreds of other modifications, on which I've spent many hundreds of hours over the years getting to work right. I'm the only tech guy with access to our servers, and just the thought of moving to completely different software gives me a headache. It will also give headaches to our members, who don't like change to begin with. (@Don Black)

Furthermore, even whilst admitting the general decline in forum use, Black emphatically foreclosed on the potential of incorporating a social media strategy.

One problem is that discussion forums, *generally speaking*, have seen their heyday. All traditional boards have taken a pounding from social media. They'll still be around, but there's less incentive for anyone to develop new software.

Even our audience spends more time on social media, but we're also more of a 'niche market,' not welcome by nor welcoming of the Zuckerbergs. Most newer board software adds an 'if ya' can't beat'em...' feature, but we obviously won't be using that, so don't expect to ever login to Stormfront with your Facebook account. (@Don Black)

It becomes clear in this quote that access to this corner of 'cyberspace', with all its grand allusions to connecting WNs worldwide, its historical dominance, recent advances in smartphone technology and mobile internet, is arbitrated by a human. In this case, a human who has poured countless hours into building the web's largest WN community, and is self-confessedly afraid of change. Finally @Don Black sums up the issue:

I've never taken much to browsing the Net via my phone. I even bought a [Samsung Galaxy] Note 3, but even the larger screen is not enough for my large thumbs and aging eyes.

The technological advances touched upon at the start of this section have given mobile users unprecedented access to digital modes of communication, notionally expanding so-called cyberspaces, and integrating them into the routines and rhythms of everyday life. Importantly, though, these technologies are only one part of the complex assemblage that makes up SF. Whilst mobile internet should be a useful platform for SF's expansion, the embodied experience is mediated through the aging leader's insecurities and ignorance, drastically limiting the potential of this 'cyberspace'. Nonetheless, the Forum is a thriving community, and it is to the solidarities which maintain it that I turn next.

'Tell the truth and fear no one' – Community and the space of 'righteous truth'

White nationalists were once organised into face-to-face groups, and, beyond word of mouth, pamphlets were the sole means of circulating ideas. These could be handed out, posted, or left in public places with the hope that inquisitive 'whites' would pick them up. The advent of the internet had two consequences for WNs. First, it extended their network through the ability to connect relatively anonymously across vast distances. Second, it led to decline in organised WN groups in offline spaces and a more atomised and individual connection to 'the movement'. Mark Potok of the SPLC described it thus:

I think 30 years ago, your typical Klansman, in a sense, was a guy standing in his living room shaking his fist at the sky and it was very difficult for him to communicate with anyone [...] I think the internet, what changed, I think that same Klansman gets up in the morning and turns on the computer and there are 25 outrage stories been sent around, you know: 'white woman gang raped in Dubuque', right? [...]

I think one of the most important points is that, yes, in that last few years we've seen the number of groups diminish, but a lot of what seems to be happening, is people are getting out of the groups and operating more individually [...] more and more people in the radical right milieu are moving away from actual membership in groups and into being more active on the web (Mark Potok, SPLC, Personal Interview)

This shift from collective offline-centred activity to individual online-centred activity produces a space where WNs are increasingly 'alone together' (Turkle 2011). Importantly, as Ryan Lenz of the SPLC told me in an interview:

[whilst] we've seen groups diminish [...it has been possible] at critical touch-points in history, for them to rally people very quickly and get people from around the world to go wherever they need to go, you know? That's a moment where the rallies... or what happened a year ago in Nevada with the anti-government movement - they got hundreds of armed people to come to that ranch from all across the country because they heard about it online.

Through this complex process of connection, distanciation, collectivism, and atomisation, a topological network of WNs has developed, drawing individuals together in online spaces and leading to new ad hoc formations offline.

Although the internet has led to a degree of individualisation and fragmentation in the WN movement, there is still a sense of community and cooperation fostered in online spaces. I argue that this is produced through the proliferation of topological connections and a sense of shared outrage and ‘righteous truth’ which unites SF users in an orientation toward ‘the other’.

Collective feelings and Transgressive Spaces of ‘Truth’

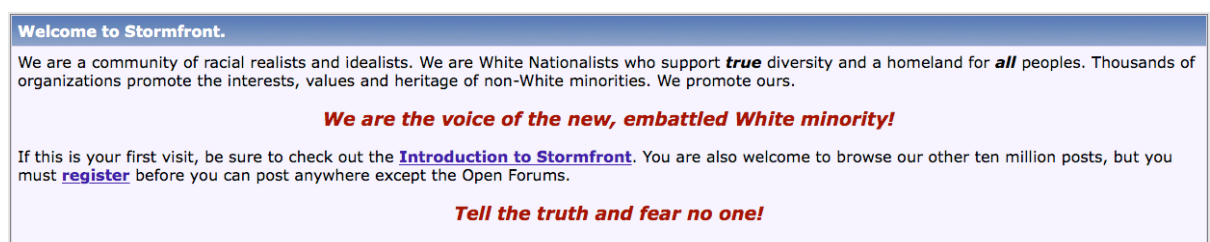


Figure 8 - Welcome banner (source: Stormfront)

In this section, I explore the alignment of WNs with each other through shared feelings. To do this, I draw on Ahmed’s (2004a, pp.26–7) contention that ‘emotions *do things*, and work to align individuals with collectives [...through] feelings-in-common’ (emphasis in original). Through the media-sharing practices discussed in the next chapter, and the construction of a community of interest, Stormfront acts as a seemingly transgressive space of awakened ‘truth’ and righteousness. Such ‘truths’ are performative, in that they both repeat past associations but also generate their opposition.

A common trope amongst SF users posits the non-WN internet as an endless minefield of politically-correct and anti-white information which seeks to indoctrinate and undermine whites and whiteness. As a result, the Forum is aligned as a collective, in part, through an oppositional orientation to anything outside of a narrow ideological and performative frame of

reference. Keegan Hanks (SPLC – Personal Interview) describes this discursive manoeuvre: ‘Stormfront is not mainstream media. They need a news source that's not mainstream media, so it's all labelled ‘truth’ or ‘what they don't want us to know’ [...] You know, they've defined Stormfront oppositionally as ‘not the MSM which lies to you’ - so, if it's not them, it's truth.’

Desire for populist-right narratives seems to have gathered pace since the 2008 financial crisis took hold, with mainstream right-wing figures increasingly reverting to tired stereotyping and scape-goating (Wodak 2015). SF also builds on the insecurities of this conjuncture to construct an image as an oppositional last bastion of ‘the truth’. For example, having distanced the Forum from Frazier Glenn Miller, *@Don Black* stated:

the rest of us try to keep Stormfront alive and moving forward, telling the truth to reasonable people who can understand the truth.

The designation of ‘reasonable people’ who show understanding constructs an inside and an outside to this space, bounding it semantically. It also produces a sense of connection that transcends proximity. Where the internet has allowed networks to proliferate through the connecting up of disparate spaces, it has also allowed WNs to avoid traversing the ideological chasm between them and non-racists through the hiving off of explicitly racist spaces.

Ideological difference/distance has historically been a challenge for racist organising and the circulation of ideas, as highlighted by Mark Potok (SPLC – Personal Interview): ‘if [the Klansman of the past] wants to write a pamphlet [...] he's going to have a hell of a time finding a printer to print that; you know [...] he might wind up getting socked in the nose, by that printer or if he's trying to tell a guy at the next stool at the bar, right?’. In this example, physical proximity does not translate to closeness. The anger emoted by the racist utterance instead produces an alignment against the Klansman, and importantly, aligns the Klansman with ideological allies. With the advent of the internet, the challenge and potential danger of breaking cover is obviated to a degree by the affordances of relative anonymity and the existence of

explicitly racist web-spaces where a topological closeness can be nurtured through an orientation towards particular constructions of ‘the truth’.

In such spaces, words and ideas become ‘sticky signs’ which work to coagulate particular meanings through articulation (see Ahmed 2004b, p.92). In the same way that the word ‘Paki’ – with all of the associated words which ‘stick’ to it – conjures up a racist and colonial history, words such as white, black, nation, and Jew, act to stick together a whole host of signs, constructing an ideological shorthand by concealing associations until they become unspoken. Understanding this shorthand, and performing whiteness accordingly, is key to successful integration into the community. It is this process that produces the spaces of ‘truth’ which draw together WNs around racist ‘common sense.’⁶⁹

Speculating on the lack of mainstream media coverage of Miller’s attacks, for example,

@CatherineGrace stated:

they don't want to raise too much curiosity about it such that people may actually look for the forums. That's a big risk for them because there is truth here.

In defending SF against the charge of racism following the same incident, @Trenna argued that:

labeling someone a racist is instrumented to prevent listening to them at all, not just expressing distaste for what they say. *When you're on the side of truth* you don't need to hide from the arguments of the other side; you welcome hearing and defeating them (emphasis added).

Here @Trenna explicitly positions SF as locked in righteous battle with ‘the other side’ broadly defined as the binary opposite of WNism.

⁶⁹ I use the term common sense here in the Gramscian sense; to denote the rehashing of hegemonic discourses, as opposed to the radical and critical alternative - ‘good sense’.

A similar argument was advanced in reverse by *@APTHeunissen* to undermine the humanity afforded to Michael Brown:

Really, can we not at least put away all of politically-correct, lionized images that have been built around Brown for a single moment and recognize this guy [as] some boisterous, belligerent [...] obnoxious, holier-than-thou, I-own-this-town street thug.

Here, *@APTHeunissen* bemoans the seeming political correctness (PC) of the response. This is a classic trope in far-right rhetoric, which aims to position (in this case) anti-racist statements as disingenuous and obsequious (see Fairclough 2003). In contrast, Stormfront members aim to throw a cordon around ‘truth’ – protecting it as the patrimony of WNs. *@Last Patrol*, for example sets up a binary opposition between Stormfront and ‘leftists’ based on their supposed relationship to the ‘truth’:

One reason I joined Stormfront is because I was sick of the way leftists avoid and twist the truth to their advantage [...] I believe the truth is on our side.

This sense, that ‘truth is on our side’, aligns individuals with the supposedly awakened collective of whiteness as defined against multiple apocryphal and oppositional others (see Ahmed 2004a).

Whilst claims to righteous patrimony of the truth are common on SF, Keegan Hanks (SPLC – Personal Interview) is keen to highlight the fantasy involved here: ‘really, the content generators on these sites are a bunch of fucking idiots. It's a bunch of just normal dudes who weren't there, didn't see it happen, who are literally just reading mainstream media or other racist websites and then what they're saying - repurposed - is being taken as fucking truth!’

The narrative of the truth-seeking/speaking white victim is of great importance in connecting WNs. This discourse draws on the (all-too) slow movement away from socially acceptable and state-sanctioned explicit racisms and the sense of loss that this brings for white heterosexual men in particular. This is typified in *@blueearth's* assertion that: ‘If a white man speaks the truth, the msm shouts racist.’ The association here of charges of racism with white

truths is key to the evasive strategy of WNs who take advantage of the backlash against so-called political correctness to construct white victimhood. Commending a new member for critiquing the so-called anti-white response to Dylann Roof, @RJM Brigade posted:

You're thinking with a discerning and clear mind! Welcome to this pro-White racially conscious discussion forum brother. Good to have you with us.

In response to another member on the same thread, @RJM Brigade argued that:

coming together as a conscious community of pro-White racist folk is one of the most important things all of us should be working on.

In these formulations 'racial consciousness' represents an awareness of the 'truth', and it is this, in part, which aligns WNs.

This produces a particularly antagonistic relationship between WNs and the supposedly 'Jewish-run' mainstream media. For example, challenging the efficacy of mainstream media accounts of events in Charleston, @ragmakepaper posted:

we all know the media is bias so the lobotomised TV viewers will just believe what they are told. There is an ever-widening gulf forming between racially-conscious Whites and those who wallow in the filth of this modern nightmare.⁷⁰

Again, the awakened, or conscious, white – the 'we' – is invoked as an archetype which interpellates the sympathetic reader. It is against this collective that 'the other' – the 'wallowing filth' – is measured and transformed into disgusting objects of collective (WN) feeling (see Ahmed 2004a).

Importantly, as Ahmed (2006, p.122) argues: 'it is the idea of community as 'being in common' that generates 'shared attributes,' which are then *retrospectively* taken up as evidence of a

⁷⁰ Of course, work in audience studies shows that audiences display far more independent critical thought than @ragmakepaper asserts (see, Morley 1992).

community’ (emphasis in original). Following this logic, I argue that white nationalism is constituted, in part, as a community of ‘righteous truth’ orientated toward ‘otherness’ as the locus of treacherous untruth and semi-mystical dangers (see Klug 2013; Wolfe 2016). This construct allows not only the alignment and interpellation of ‘awakened whites’ with WNism, but also implies a position of superiority from which all opposing or inconvenient perspectives may be dismissed:

The 15-20 % who can reason and accept truth as well as the dominant 5% are our intended audience. The enemy is unimportant as they will simply invent something if it suits them (@AI Kelz).

This double move of self-aggrandisement and dismissal serves to maintain the cohesion of the Forum and to deflect certain forms of criticism. The mechanics of this process are taken up in greater detail in the next chapter.

Conclusions

This chapter has examined the materiality of so-called ‘cyberspaces’, and tentatively charted some of their associated vulnerabilities. I have argued that, rather than transcending ‘physical spaces’, ‘cyberspace’ augments everyday embodied practices, and folds them into spatial imaginaries of the ‘digital’. Through recounting the story of the arrest and trial of SF Italia’s moderators, I have highlighted the contingent spatiality of the ‘cyberspatial’. Following McFarlane (2009) I argue that SF must be understood as a translocal assemblage if anti-racist praxis is to develop effective strategies to combat racism online which avoid reductive online/offline binaries.

I follow the example of the letter writing campaign and Mirko Viola’s response to demonstrate the topological circulation of SF as it shuttles from the online context into the

offline, and back again, following rhizomatic lines of connection. Here I hope to have shown that the topology of SF reaches well beyond the bounded web protocols and digital infrastructure of the website, necessitating attention to the more-than-digital geographies of ‘cyberspace’ and ‘virtual communities’. Here, I advocate expanding understandings of the materialities of the ‘digital’ beyond the infrastructural (contra Kitchin & Dodge 2011; Kinsley 2014). I argue that this process of connection, coupled with the relative anonymity of the web, allows racists to avoid traversing the ideological chasm between themselves and anti-racists in face-to-face interactions, through seeking out connections to likeminded others online.

To demonstrate this, I briefly touched upon the importance of interface and the embodied processes of *being* (as opposed to *going*) online. Again, here, I explored the vulnerability of ‘cyberspace’ to materiality, through discussion of the challenges of accessing SF on a mobile device and the reticence of @Don Black to change the Forum’s software to a more mobile friendly platform, undermining dominant narratives of technological advance.

Finally, I have argued, following Ahmed (2004a) that Forum members have constructed a community of ‘collective feeling’ around a shared sense of ownership over ‘righteous truth’. Through harnessing the topological connectibility of the web, WNs are brought closer together around shared ideological discourses which align SF members through an orientation toward the other.

In the next chapter, I take up the three case studies in more detail to explore the orientation of this community of ‘collective feeling’ toward the mainstream media. Here, I examine the strategies of (re)mediation and discourses of ‘righteous truth’ which WNs deploy to ‘manage’ their stigmatized identities during unfolding media events.

Chapter 5. 'The Ferguson opportunity': (media)(tion), remediation, and the management of racialized moral panics

Introduction

New media has been integral to the WN movement's continued existence. Since the victories of the civil rights movement, explicitly racist organising and activism in physical spaces has become more difficult. As argued in the previous chapter, much of this energy has been channelled into CMC. This relatively new form of connectivity has been exploited by WNs in order to access mediated circuits of knowledge production in an attempt to influence circulating narratives. The title of this chapter reflects such engagement – referring to the contestation of moral panic discourses through taking advantage of increased media attention to SF surrounding events in Ferguson. Indeed, As Aupers (2012, p.27) argues: 'the Internet does provide citizens with a platform to (inter)actively deconstruct official versions of the 'truth', to consume alternative accounts and to produce their own theories'. The capability to reproduce and (re)circulate racialized moral panics has allowed WNs to maintain a critical level of anxiety – integral to the power of fear-fuelled racist narratives.

In this chapter, I draw on and extend Fiske's (1996) concept of discursive struggle and the producerly text, to argue for a radical rethinking of the concept of moral panic in the digital age as a (re)producerly text where both content *and* direction are collaboratively (re)produced between 'reader' and 'text'. This reconceptualization goes beyond relatively recent attempts to recognise the role of 'micro-media' (McRobbie & Thornton 1995) – to argue for the democratising potential of social media, and web 2.0 more generally. Whilst micro-media – such as clandestine, low-circulation, zines – gave 'folk devils' a platform from which to contest their

demonization, I argue that the affordances of social media have given such groups a wider reach than traditional hard-copy media. Furthermore, given the proliferation of ‘prosumption’ and participatory web culture (Lievrouw 2006; Beer & Burrows 2010), these groups are now better positioned to influence circulating panics. Such panics, I argue below, can be broadly categorised into two, often interrelated, ideal ‘types’: *favourable* and *unfavourable*. The nature of a circulating panic, and the degree to which the subject is favourable or unfavourable to racist agendas, goes some way to define the WN response.

Examining WN responses, I observe that during racialized media-events SF ‘shifts gears’– turning outwards. Here, I argue that, as the number of visitors or ‘lurkers’ on the forum rises – e.g. journalists, racists, anti-racists and federal agents – SF folds an outward-facing broadcast model into its typical narrow introspection. Throughout such periods, I argue, this online community becomes an insurgent media source – where information is gathered and shared across vast networks, and attempts are made by members to contest and shape the dominant narrative of events. As a result, SF becomes a tactical space of public relations for the WN movement. Faced with unfavourable panics, SF members attempt to manage stigmatizing discourses. through communicating directly with the ‘outside world’. This management is often achieved through the (re)production and exploitation of favourable panics which take the attention away from organised racism.

In reporting on racialized media-events, mainstream media reports regularly include quotes taken from SF threads, giving this group of virulent racists a kind of fugitive access to the heart of the racialized discursive struggle. In these moments, I argue, a problematic relationship is formed whereby mainstream media outlets become nodes and collaborators in a white supremacist broadcast network.

Finally, I argue for a nuanced and tangled understanding of the power relations into which WNs are articulated in relation to media. Drawing on de Certeau (1984) and Scott (1990), I argue that WNs enact a form of reactionary resistance to challenge their stigmatization. Whilst this effort is born of a sense of marginalisation, WNs are able to deploy hegemonic notions of whiteness and everyday white supremacy in their defence. They are simultaneously positioned both outside and inside various circuits of power. In this sense, I argue that SF represents a *tactical space of strategic contestation*.⁷¹ This becomes apparent when it is applied to moral panics, and it is to these phenomena that I turn first.

Moral panics

As highlighted in Chapter Two above, original theorisations of the ‘moral panic’ (see, Cohen 1972; Hall et al. 1978) are reliant on the production and circulation of narratives by mainstream media, and fail to fully explain the phenomenon in the contemporary convergent and participatory mediascape. Although Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) call for attention to grassroots groups as moral entrepreneurs, their analysis too comes from before the proliferation of digital media and CMC. More recent retheorizing (McRobbie & Thornton 1995; David et al. 2011) goes some way to extending the concept to account for the new context. However, this section will show that whilst moving in the right direction, such efforts still fall short of the radical re-theorising required.

⁷¹ Here, I challenge De Certeau’s (1984) tactics/strategies binary, arguing that actors are articulated into far more complex and tangled relations of power and resistance (see, Sharp et al. 2000).

By examining how moral panics are (re)produced and (re)circulated on SF, I argue that the emergence of, and increased access to, social media has had a pseudo-democratising⁷² effect on the construction and circulation of panic narratives. I go on to outline two ‘types’ of panic faced by WNs: *favourable panics*, which promulgate racist discourses and can be exploited to advance WN agendas (e.g. panics over supposed ‘black criminality’); and *unfavourable panics*, which bring unwanted scrutiny upon racism and racists, and must be ‘managed’ to avoid further stigma or proscription (e.g. panics over racist violence). Importantly, these ‘types’ are not discrete and elements of each may be present within the anatomy of a single moral panic. Finally, I argue that both ‘types’ of moral panic provide the essential ‘breath’ that sustains WN movements, through the (re)production of a constant state of paranoia and anger.

‘To be silent is to allow their propaganda to go unchecked’ – Democratization of the moral panic

As argued already, whilst the moral panics of the 1960s and 70s were argued to develop more or less unilaterally (Cohen 1972; Goode & Ben-Yehuda 1994) – emanating from mainstream media and elites for relatively uncritical digestion by the mass media consumer – there has been a clear process of democratization in the age of social media. There has been a clear proliferation in the number of agents of circulation involved in the (re)production and movement of the moral panic. Where panics of the past represented what Fiske (1996) describes as producerly texts – where meaning is co-produced by author and reader – I want to argue that contemporary panics are better understood as *(re)producerly* texts. By this, I mean that the meaning

⁷² I use the term democratising here advisedly – and for want of a better word – simply to refer to the extension of participatory potential, not to suggest that an inherently progressive agenda underlies such a process.

and the content and direction of moral panics are memetically open to contestation and transformation. This intensification in the form of circulation in the digital age amplifies and unsettles the producerly text.

Access to social media and the convergent mediascape has changed the way that moral panics are (re)produced and (re)circulated. Whilst most successful panics still seem to find their genesis in mainstream media, such discourses no longer enjoy the authority they may have once exerted. Where mediated discourses were subject to bitter local contestation in the old media environment, the logics of web virality have intensified access to far wider discursive environments than in pre-digital contexts (see, Burgess 2008; Jenkins et al. 2013). Furthermore, the franchise of moral entrepreneurship has been extended well beyond the ‘editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people’ emphasised by (Cohen 1972, p.1) – and contestation has become more public. This is not to say that all have equal access to public discourse – and certainly not that all have equal status or influence. However, it remains the case that the potential to influence the direction and content of moral panics can no longer be understood as being confined exclusively to ‘elites’. This is a fact well understood by WNs who take every opportunity to influence the framing of moral panics.

Given their attention to the circulation of moral panics, the power of the mainstream media is a central concern for SF users. Members make frequent reference to the ‘Jewsmedia’⁷³ (*@Peace Through Stormfront*) – a supposedly conspiratorial body whose core agenda is the genocide of the white race. The necessity to contest panics seemingly circulated by such a cabal, then, is paramount for WNs. It is clear in debate surrounding circulating media narratives, that SF is a

⁷³ ‘Jewsmedia’ is a play on ‘news media’ and is a commonly used to highlight what SF users see as the domination of ‘the media’ by Jews and Jewish interests.

strategic space of ideological contestation. Indeed, founder, *@Don Black*, outlines the agenda of SF as ‘providing information not available in the controlled media and building a community of White activists working for the survival of our [white] people’. In moments of remediation by MSM, where SF is rendered visible beyond its own bounded web protocols, members often debate the value of engaging with circulating panic discourses. Pre-internet iterations of WN organisations, such as the KKK and White Aryan Resistance, had to rely on small-scale, risky, hard-copy dissemination of counter-hegemonic literature such as pamphlets and newsletters. This marginal form of media was, at this point, the preserve of fringe groups, and, as such, sat awkwardly outside of the dominant narrative without posing a serious threat. Now, in the age of many-to-many digital communication, and the growing legitimacy of discourses forged through presumption, WNs are (at least notionally) able to contest and/or amplify moral panic narratives through the circulation of alternative discourses online. It is important to note, however, that the convergent media-scape means that any number of individuals and groups have access to these discursive circuits, and WNs are one voice among many. This plurality often leads to contestation over the best response to racialized media-events. What follows is a typical example of discursive struggle on SF – surrounding the case of Frazier Glenn Miller – where users debate the response to a developing moral panic about racist violence.

Immediately following the identification of Miller as the shooter in Kansas City, mediated accounts of the attacks began to implicate extreme right web forums, such as SF. This act of association was quickly manipulated by SF users to fit the ‘white victim’ narrative, common to many contemporary racist movements. Two contrasting media tactics emerged, both of which aimed to challenge the seemingly biased MSM (see Figure 9).

@hens are liars: I am of the opinion that this story should be totally ignored in this forum. The mainstream media deserves the same treatment that they give.

How often does the mainstream media sensationalize black on white crime?

How often does the mainstream media sensationalize jewish criminality? [...]

Do you all remember the treatment the mainstream [media] gave the following two stories, and hundreds if not thousands of other similar stories?

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder...stopher_Newsom

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wichita_Massacre

Yet we are to help the mainstream [media] by further disseminating their copy? We don't owe them anything and we certainly should not help them to spread their agitprop. For the most part we should ignore stories that detail aggressions towards special interest groups and minorities, and instead focus on stories about their aggression towards whites.

→ **@treuwa:** I promise you "they" are going to talk about it and seek to use it to defame pro-White sentiments regardless of what goes on here. This forum is where folks can see the actual response of actual WNs. That's the difference. To be silent is to allow their propaganda to go unchecked.

→ **@BloodRaven:** Exactly, and furthermore as Kayden has been bringing up, we have to be the people to point out this was a race-mixer that killed White Christians. No one else is going to talk about that other than us, so we have to talk about it.

→ **@Kayden:** 100-200 guests consistently viewing since I got on this thread last night. Reason enough to keep shooting down the lies from the other side, if you ask me. 🤖

→ **@N lightning:** That's all well and good when you control the mainstream media, but we don't get to say what goes into the public conscious they do. I don't think we should let them peddle this story without reply"

→ **@Don Black:** All Americans are hearing from the controlled media, along with Europeans everywhere, is "White supremacist, "KKK Grand Dragon" and "neo-Nazi" murdering old people and children

→ **@Kayden:** That's why I changed the title of this thread Don. Not just to reflect how we see this guy but also to skew their efforts a bit. If there's a link on another site to this thread I'm hoping anyone who moves their mouse across it will see a completely different version of the guy staring back at them....even if they don't click. Not completely sure if it works like that, but I hope you don't mind.

Figure 9 – Discussion on media tactics (Source: Stormfront)

Realising the importance of circulation, as an agentic act,⁷⁴ to the influence of ‘media events’, some users advocated an enforced silence regarding the Miller story. *@bens are liars*, for example, argued – based on a highly selective reading of mainstream news – that, since white crimes are disproportionately covered in MSM, SF users should use their platform to highlight aggression towards whites. Using a common populist-right tactic, *@bens are liars* references two totemic cases of ‘black-on-white’ violence which, it is argued, did not receive ample media attention because of a perceived political correctness agenda (see for example, Horowitz 2002).

These news stories are held as exemplars of the anti-white racism of the MSM, which, *@bens are liars* argues, refuses to report on ‘anti-white’ violence for fear of being branded racist. This is a bastardised form of what Fiske (1996, pp.5–6) describes as the ‘recover[y] of the repressed or center[ing of] the marginalized’ in his theorisation of discursive struggle. *@bens are liars* attempts to insinuate whites into a false position of marginality and victimhood in order to construct them as an embattled majority. This foray into the discursive field is one of many examples of a reactionary and regressive resistance which I discuss further below.

In this example, media bias is given as evidence of the unfair treatment of whites compared with other racialized groups who supposedly receive preferential treatment. The corrective solution to this, advanced by *@bens are liars*, is that WNs should ignore this story and refrain from circulating it any further in order to avoid ‘helping’ the MSM.

Although SF is often presented in media accounts as the homogenous voice of white nationalism, it is, in fact, a space of fierce debate surrounding the past, present, and future of the

⁷⁴ Jenkins *et al* (2013) argue that spreadable media require deliberate action to maintain and extend their circulation. In this way, the meanings of texts are shaped through their movement or lack of movement.

movement. Reaction to *@bens are liars* was mixed. Initial support⁷⁵ quickly segued into critique as *@treuma* argued that ‘they’ – the so-called Jewish controlled media – would circulate the story regardless of SF reaction. In response, *@treuma*, *@Kayden*, *@BloodRaven*, and *@N lightning* highlighted the potential of SF to challenge unfavourable narratives through engagement with lurkers and visitors. In this way, SF began to emerge as a space, not only of introspective discussion and organisation, but of outward-facing broadcast. I expand on this more fully below.

In the discussion reproduced above, the option to contest MSM narratives is evidence of an expanded field of discursive (re)production. Although not all attempts to influence circulating discourses result in the desired remediation, the existence of the possibility emboldens SF users to redouble their efforts. In response to civil unrest in Ferguson, for example, one user calls for discursive intervention:

the media is altering the narrative over this event. Look how if you read anything about the black riots of the 1960s, they are always described in neutral or apologetic terms, no mention is made of whites who were killed in these riots. The media is doing the exact same thing here. We have to use social media and memes to document the fact that co-existence is not possible with non-whites. ((@WhiteNationhood)

There is an acknowledgement here that the memetic movement of ideas has democratized the mediascape, giving WNs greater opportunity to produce and circulate their own narratives. Racialized moral panics take various forms, necessitating different responses. It is to these dynamics that I turn now.

⁷⁵ e.g. *@Peace Through Stormfront* – ‘Agreed. Delete the thread and pay no further attention to this event’

Favourable/unfavourable moral panics – exploitation/'management'

Moral panics, by their nature, produce 'inside' and 'outside' subjects – the 'us' who are threatened, and the 'them' who are in some way threatening. As a result, they often take on a racialized character (see, Hall et al. 1978). As I hope I have shown, in the convergent media-scape, panics are multiple and diffuse. At any one point, the same group may be simultaneously positioned inside and outside various circulating panics – as outraged 'victim' in some and as 'problematic community' in others. For example, whilst WNs are often rightly demonized in relation to racially-motivated attacks, they are able to deflect a certain amount of negative attention by distancing themselves from violence and drawing on circulating racist panics to justify their anger.

WNs on SF regularly find themselves in contradictory positions relative to circulating panic discourses. Rarely, if ever, are explicit racists such as SF users afforded the victim status that they try to claim, by the MSM. Certain racialized moral panics, however, are of greater utility to WNs than others. I argue in this section that, rather than 'good' and 'bad' moral panics (see, Cohen 2011b), panics are better understood as *unfavourably* or *favourably* positioning particular actors. In the context of SF, the first are those which are unfavourable to racists – i.e. those which problematize prevailing structural or individual racism. Such panics and the stigmatization they (re)produce must be 'managed' by WNs through the processes of contestation discussed below. The second type of panic are those which rely on racist representations of the 'other', and are generally favourable to racist groups. These tend to bear no direct relation to organised racism, but, rather, are inherently racialized. Whilst the first form of panic must be contested and managed by WNs, this second type is often exploited to advance racist agendas. It is this second type which is represented in the notion of the 'Ferguson opportunity' – circulated by @Harumphy Dumpty to encourage active discursive struggle – and which lends its title to this

chapter. This section continues with discussion and examples of these two ideal ‘types’, before pointing to their complex imbrication.

Unfavourable panics

As outlined above, unfavourable panics are those which must be managed by WNs to avoid further stigma and/or proscription. These usually take the form of concerns about institutional racism, or an increase in episodes of racially motivated or extreme right violence. In these cases, WNs are compelled to manage their stigmatization.

For example, immediately following the church shooting in Charleston, media reports began to emerge which placed Stormfront at the centre of debate about racist violence (e.g. Nelson et al. 2015). Whilst Dylann Roof had not been linked to SF at this point – and remains unlinked to the Forum – various MSM outlets turned to threads on SF for reaction. I argue below that this remediation allowed SF members fugitive access to the heart of discursive struggle – allowing them space to (re)make and negotiate their identities. For now, though, I want to explore the ways by which SF users attempt to ‘manage’ such unfavourable panics.

In cases of explicitly racist violence, such as Charleston or Kansas City, a common tactic is to undermine the mental health of the attacker(s) and psychologise any hatred. In the case of Frazier Glenn Miller, for example, a clear case was made by many members that he was a ‘bad apple’ (@Arta); unrepresentative of the forum. Before Miller was identified as the shooter @WhiteNationhood optimistically posted:

I am hoping this was done by a proud Transgender Muslim of Color who’s active in their local International Workers of the World chapter, but if it was someone who calls themselves a WN then I really hope it was a bad case of mental illness and not ideological with a Breivik-style manifesto as the fallout will be awful.

Here @WhiteNationhood makes a clear distinction between rational and irrational violence, and, understanding the reputational damage that actions of this sort can do, constructs a ‘monstrous’ tongue-in-cheek suspect upon whom to foist blame.⁷⁶

Following the revelation that Miller was the shooter, @Robert Ransdell argued that he had: ‘[gone] nuts clearly’, adding – perhaps somewhat disingenuously, given Miller’s well documented history of Klan and Neo-Nazi activity – ‘who knows why though.’ Other members were similarly quick to psychologise and pathologise Miller’s actions:

This Nut-Job Glenn Miller, is an embarrassment to human kind, as long as mental insane nuts like him are out there preaching there warped version of nationalism, we will struggle for recognition. (@CelticPride1488)

these deluded lunatics are our worst enemies and do huge damage to white nationalism. We should all condemn this senseless act in the strongest terms (@Lautoka)

One member, in admonishing another for proclaiming the day of the shooting as a ‘sad [one] for white nationalism’ pointed to the ‘lone-wolf’ nature of the attack as evidence that this was, in fact, unrelated to white nationalism: ‘How IS it a sad day for White Nationalism? Was there a council of White Nationalists who sanctioned this?’ adding, ‘Buddy, you talk like the MSM’ (@Great Australian Bite).

Management of the same panic over organised racist violence, revitalised by Roof’s attacks in Charleston, relied on the very same tropes:

He’s no hero, that’s for sure. Looks mentally ill to me [...] that picture of him... my God, the guy looks like a psychopath. Was he under the care of a psychiatrist? (@Huginn ok Muninn)

⁷⁶ This strategy bears an interesting resemblance to mainstream right wing political parties’ monsterring and abjecting of the ‘extreme right’ whilst appealing to a populist and *volk*-ish ‘people’.

Mentally deranged people have nothing to do with the white race
(@WhiteVirginian)

Here, @WhiteVirginian takes the opportunity to denounce the violent act, whilst making an argument for the superiority of the white mind (one which challenges the phenotypical notion of race). This denigration of physical violence, whilst contributing to symbolically violent discourses is commonplace in organised racism, and is a common response to the unfavourable panic. Not all racialized panics are damaging to the WN cause, however, and it is to the *favourable* panic that I now turn.

Favourable panics

Whilst many racialized panics revolve around the growth of white supremacy and associated violent episodes, these are still situated within an inherently white supremacist mediascape (see, Bonilla-Silva 2006; Noble 2014). As a result of this systemic racism, there is another, far more common, ‘type’ of racialized panic which is *favourable* to the WN agenda. These are classic racist panics which revolve around the supposed threat of the ‘other’. Examples include, the threat of Black sexuality and criminality (see, hooks 1994); the threat of Islamist terrorism and the encroachment of Islamic culture (see, Kumar 2012; Kundnani 2014); or, a recurring favourite much of the MSM, the threat of immigration (see, Pijpers 2006; Tyler 2013).

Such panics are ripe for exploitation by WNs, who compile thread upon thread of news stories about rapes and murders allegedly perpetrated by Black suspects. SF follows and remediates the news-cycle, offering real-time discussion and ‘analysis’ of unfolding media-events. In the period of civil unrest following the Grand Jury decision in Ferguson, for example, certain senior SF users encouraged action:

Folks, all this commenting is fine, but take a brief moment to use *the Ferguson opportunity* to spread our memes (@Harumphy Dumpty – my emphasis)

The opportunity referred to here, was the increased media attention and the perennial return of dog-whistle racism around racialized moral panics. Even in the case of Ferguson – where institutionally racist American policing provided the catalyst for an anti-racist panic – Brown was quickly framed in sections of the mainstream press as a thief, a thug, and a gang member (Barrabi 2014; Eligon 2014; Kohler 2014). These racialized representations were quickly exploited by SF members to produce a narrative of Brown as deserving of his fate. @WhiteRights posted a series of pictures of Brown wearing various items of red clothing:

Here's the 'innocent child' Michael Brown. Funny how often he's wearing the gangbanger color red. (@WhiteRights)

Here, @WhiteRights seals Brown into the 'crushing objecthood' discussed by Fanon (2008 [1967], p82). Just as Fanon describes being painfully and cripplingly externally defined, Brown, is portrayed as if he were a gang member. In the same way that black professionals are often described exceptionally as 'the negro teacher [or] the Negro doctor' (ibid, p88), Brown's red clothing – unexceptional on a white body – is evidence of gang affiliation on his black body. To borrow from Kilomba (2013, p.42); Michael Brown 'is used as a screen for the projections of what the *white* [sic]⁷⁷ society has made taboo'.

See ... to the Negroes, their riot is a revolt against the White Man's civilization. Unlike us, living in 'our' society day to day is an *ordeal* for them. All those ridiculous rules of civilization - studying, saying please and thank you, paying for things, not killing people, wearing clothing ... all the White man's nonsense they have to suffer under. And so these periodic events are their *excuse* to be free - to run loose and grab whatever they want just like in ancient Africa, to burn the books that represent thought and work ... 'Free at last, free at last, thank God almighty free at last ...

It is the Call of the Blood.' (@Dr. Ford)

⁷⁷ Kilomba italicises the word *white* to problematize its foundations in reality.

Through, @Dr. Ford's comments, it is clear to see a strong sense of white entitlement and the dehumanizing imperative which justifies and maintains it.

Although I present these moral panic 'types' as separate, there is a third hybrid and tangled common moral panic scenario which combines both. The panic surrounding Mike Brown's murder in Ferguson in August 2014, for example, began by riding the crest of a tragic wave of police violence against unarmed black men. This panic highlighted the historic structural racism inherent to the US police force and was a contributing factor to the development of the #blacklivesmatter campaign. Within days of the shooting, there were heated protests on the streets of Ferguson over police racism and militarization. Civil unrest grew in the city over the next few months and built to a crescendo in November with the Grand Jury decision not to indict the shooter, Officer Darren Wilson; when much of Downtown Ferguson was looted and set alight (Lowery et al. 2014; Derickson 2016). Over this period, immediately following the shooting, a racist 'new' panic emerged in the right-wing outlets of the MSM which foregrounded the supposed criminality and savagery of young African Americans (see, Sanburn 2014). Whilst the first panic surrounding Ferguson was broadly characterised by antiracism, the second brought 'old' racist tropes back into circulation. Importantly, circulating discourses in the racist and anti-racist panics were not discrete, and discursive struggles abounded (see, LeFebvre & Armstrong 2016).

WNs on SF were forced to manage their stigmatized identity, which came under increased scrutiny in the months following the shooting. They did so, largely, by drawing on circulating discourses of the racist panic. Brown was painted as a thug who deserved his fate, whilst any remaining tragedy was deliberately undermined by reference to the disproportionately

violent and ‘savage’ response of ‘the black community’.⁷⁸ Indeed, the protests, and the increased media attention they garnered, were argued to be an opportunity for WNs to ‘[hammer their] **STOP WHITE GENOCIDE** memes into the mainstream’ (@*Harumphy Dumpty*). I argue in the following section that this creative engagement by WNs with the panic surrounding Ferguson typifies the contemporary convergent media-scape and points to what I have described above as a pseudo-democratization of the moral panic.

Moral panics: the ‘breath’ of WNism

It is clear from the preceding discussion, that moral panics are essential to the project and continued membership of white nationalism. Racialized panics fulfil two key functions on Stormfront. The first is clear in the number of unregistered ‘visitors’ to the site and the high rate of registrations immediately following incidents of racialized violence.

The importance of totemic racialized media-events to the membership of SF is highlighted in a post by @*pizzaguy* following the inauguration of Barack Obama in 2009:⁷⁹

‘**first** it was [hurricane] Katrina (which brought me in [to SF]) and **now** Obongo [Obama] in the whitehouse. I shudder to think what the **NEXT** event will be - Dow at 1000? Unemployment at 12%? An extra tax on whites to pay reparations to blacks?’ (emphasis in original)

⁷⁸ This is presented in ‘scare quotes’ to avoid the problematic notion of a single and homogenous ‘black community’.

⁷⁹ This quote is not taken from the case study material collected for this PhD, but from my broader engagement with SF over the year prior to my concerted empirical work. It is taken from a thread titled: ‘Hundreds of thousands of new SF readers, tens of thousands of new SF Members -- You MUST read My Awakening!’ This thread was started by Dr. David Duke – a prominent member of the WN community – in response to the spate of new registrations on the forum when Barack Obama won the 2009 U.S. presidential election.

This quote typifies circulating discourses on SF, which tend to (re)produce a paradoxical relationship where future racialized media-events are feared on one hand, and breathlessly anticipated on the other. The countdown to the Grand Jury decision in Ferguson, for example, was seized as an opportunity for celebration, and real gratification was drawn by members in the sharing in a racialized media-event:

I'm literally going out, getting some food, and throwing another acquittal party. This must be what the Super Bowl is like to other people. (@S Man)

I haven't been this giddy in... since I don't know when [...] 😊 (@Lord Tinsdale)

I want to argue that the open and malleable nature of circulating narratives means the Forum acts like a choose-your-own-adventure book, where members (re)produce news-events drawing on a range of options structured by group norms. In turn, the Forum's over-arching narrative can be read in a number of different ways, depending on how one configures circulating stories. This discursive creativity is intensified as a result of the threaded and hyperlinked reading practices of a web forum. As Mark Potok of the SPLC told me in an interview: 'One of the interesting things about Stormfront is that you can see people working out ideological questions [...] 'Who's worse. the Jews or the Negroes? [...] Sharing racialized news stories is] just stoking the fire so you can stay angry, right? And then you've got the chorus, the: 'yeah, you're right. That's because that's what Negroes are, that's what black people do'. (SPLC - personal interview).

White nationalism relies on a steady stream of panic narratives to maintain a critical level of engagement by members. Indeed, as Raphael Ezekiel (1995, p.xxxi) argues, 'the vital function of the movement is to keep [their] beliefs in an active state.' Both favourable and unfavourable panics are essential to the continued existence of organized white nationalism. Latent personal

racism is drawn into the semi-public sphere through the manufacture of outrage and the gathering of sympathetic others. This sets SF up as a community of shared feeling through (re)producing orientations to a range of ‘others’, as discussed in the previous chapter (see, Ahmed 2004a). With this in mind, it is to the media practices which produce and sustain this collective narrative that I now turn.

Stormfront’s convergent media practices

Stormfront is a semi-open web forum, with only an anonymous account sign-up standing between prospective members and the full range of SF discourse. Unlike a conspiracy site, like *911truth.org*, Stormfront has no single *cause célèbre*. Instead, the Forum closely follows, and responds to, the news-cycle – (re)producing racist conspiracist narratives of circulating media-events. During periods of racialized moral panic – favourable or unfavourable – the news sub-forum becomes a central focus for members and non-member-guests alike, as stories are contested, spun, and amplified. For example, in the run up to the Ferguson Grand Jury decision on the shooting of Michael Brown, many members discussed what they perceived to be the conspiratorial politics behind the case:

Jews want a race war to keep the Whites attention on the blacks & mestizos, while jews steal from us Whites. It's a ploy to divert attention away from jewish criminals. (@vikingcelt)

This quote ties in to and reinforces a pervasive anti-Semitic discourse in WN circles, which attacks what Adorno (2002, p.222) describes as the fascist ‘bogie[, building up] an *imagery* of the Jew’ through repeated articulation of Jews into circulating negative discourses as a scapegoat.

Describing neo-Nazi media, Couldry (cited in Atton 2004, p.62) asserts that such groups invert the alternative media practice of constructing a ‘community without closure’. Instead, he argues, a ‘community *with* closure’ is formed - denying certain ‘others’ the status and ability to speak of their experience. Unlike the BNP’s prescriptive and hierarchical form, which Atton (2006) argues supports Couldry’s claim by foreclosing on engagement with the process of identity construction, Stormfront encourages creative discussion around what the WN movement and the Forum are and what they could be. This active engagement is encouraged by the addition of sub-fora such as ‘suggestions for this Board: how can we make this board work for us?’ and ‘ideology and philosophy: foundations for White Nationalism’. Though these spaces are explicitly provided as spaces of contestation, it is clear that the majority of ideological construction and (re)circulation takes place in the ‘Newlinks’ sub-forum. It is here that WN abstract ideological framing is tested and applied.

Furthermore, the Forum includes a sub-forum giving opponents with ‘dissenting views’ a space to contest circulating discourses – something relatively rare in WN media. In the scheme of far and extreme right media, then, SF seems more democratically open in terms of constructive debate around ideology and identity. This openness was frequently highlighted in my interviews with SPLC staffers, in relation to the decision by Don Black, SF’s founder and webmaster, to maintain the Forum as a living archive of the WN movement and its development – warts and all – rather than taking a strict hegemonic editorial stance (personal interviews – Mark Potok; Ryan Lenz; Stephen Piggot and Keegan Hanks - SPLC).

Whilst, on the whole, Stormfront is an introspective space of reflection and discussion, during periods of racialized moral panic, the Forum is able to turn its attention outward through indirect engagement with mediated narratives. Far from comprising a traditional source of alternative media, I suggest that SF represents a *flexible* space of convergent mediation. That is,

the forum is adaptive – shifting between introspection and broadcast in relative sync with the rhythms of mainstream news-media. This broadcast is, in part, driven by a desire in the MSM to elicit ‘authentic’ voices in relation to breaking stories, and, in part, an effort by SF users to influence mediated narratives by ‘placing’ comments in the MSM. In these moments, I argue that SF shifts gears, becoming a broadcast node for the wider WN movement, dependent on MSM amplification.

Convergence - ‘Source promiscuity’ and narrative construction

SF has a complex relationship to the MSM. WNs are very critical of the so-called ‘Jewsmedia’ or ‘controlled media’ which is in general seen to be a propaganda arm of the so-called Zionist Occupation Government. At the same time, regardless of the proliferation of activist journalism, they seem hamstrung by a lack of other ‘reliable’ coverage of big media events – becoming totally reliant on MSM outlets:

I wouldn't call this story ‘confirmed’ until some mainstream source like Drudge or Fox News starts reporting on this (@WhiteRights)

Here, @WhiteRights reasserts a traditional hierarchical notion of media, to challenge the efficacy and authenticity of ‘alternative’ media sources. Where new media have notionally widened the communicative franchise, then, they still often work within the constraints of hegemonic power relations (see, Karppinen 2008).

In general, right-wing mainstream media are the preferred source for daily news sharing on SF, because of their tendency to (re)produce favourable moral panics. However, during periods of intense activity surrounding media events such as the three case studies presented here, a much broader media strategy is adopted. Elements of stories from ideologically diverse sources are cherry-picked and stitched together to form a (sometimes) coherent WN narrative.

In the hours prior to the scheduled announcement of the Grand Jury verdict on Officer Darren Wilson, SF was buzzing with anticipation. Much talk of an impending ‘chimpout’⁸⁰

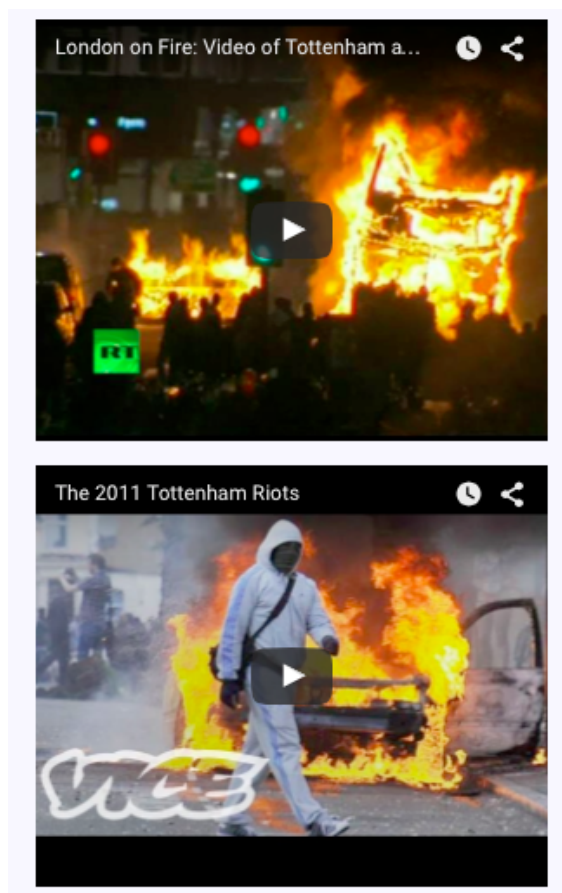


Figure 10 - Youtube videos posted to SF by
@Genseric

(@prondtobewhite95) and the benefits of the inevitable ‘race war’ (@celtictexan), was supplemented by two Youtube videos, posted by @Genseric (uploaded by RT⁸¹ and Vice⁸²), which documented violent episodes during the 2011 ‘riots’ in London . Following Fiske (1996), it is clear to see that, in sharing these videos, @Genseric attempts to *disarticulate* civil unrest in Ferguson from the geographically specific concerns of protesters, and *rearticulate* it with racist perceptions of universal black criminality (See Figure 10).

Whilst both RT and Vice have been fairly critical of the far right in recent articles

(see, RT 2015; Turbett 2015), @Genseric makes no acknowledgement of source at all – promiscuously and pragmatically stitching together an *ad hoc* alternative narrative using all available (re)sources (see, Adler 2013). It is important, here, that @Genseric’s foray into the discursive struggle over civil unrest in Ferguson be seen within the context of other

⁸⁰ Racist slang for rioting in majority black areas

⁸¹ Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7H02HSip_c

⁸² Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3WmMhircZOc>

contemporaneous extant discourses which *disarticulated* and *rearticulated* different aspects of the story to construct yet further alternative ‘realities’. The #BLM movement, for example, disarticulated Darren Wilson’s violence from the local news reports of Michael Brown’s alleged petty crimes and resistance to arrest, instead rearticulating the shooting with historic incidents of racialized violence in an attempt to explain protesters’ anger (see @Blklivesmatter on Twitter). A shift should be noted here in discursive register from SF to #BLM. Comments from the loosely organised #BLM movement consistently refer to ‘protesters’ and ‘activists’ rather than ‘rioters’. The sympathetic tone of these alternatives belies the allegiances of the campaign, and demonstrates a commitment to positively influencing regimes of representation.

Shortly before the verdict was announced, Stormfront traffic was relatively high as members and ‘visitors’ clamoured around two threads on the event. Worried that the diffusion of the topic was detracting from the attention it should be getting, @Cameron_ben appealed to moderators to rationalise the threads:

Why are there two primary threads for this? Can we not get a single stickied thread?

When, after about twenty minutes, the threads were merged, other members complained that the move had damaged viewing figures:

Could the mods quit meddling with a highly active thread with a lot of outside viewers? Several Perfectly good posts have been deleted!! (@WhiteRights)

Two threads were merged. And I noted numbers of viewers declined dramatically (@vikingcelt)

Soon enough, numbers were up again and the discussion continued in the newly amalgamated thread. This effort to streamline the Forum is, in part, pragmatic; it is easier to navigate the stories and discussion if they are collected in one place. Relatedly, I think that this represents a commitment to presenting a concentrated and ‘professional’ response to media-events. The

mundane work of moderation is key to the smooth running of the Forum, and the reception of WN discourses in times of intense public scrutiny.

Following the announcement of the verdict just before 8.25pm US Eastern Time – a shameful ‘no indictment’ – angry protesters who had gathered outside the court, went on the move. With 435-450 users on the Ferguson thread, members pieced together emerging details to construct a narrative of the unfolding events. At this stage, a Missouri State police radio scanner frequency had been shared which supposedly allowed users to follow unrest in real time. When I signed onto the webpage hosting the scanner in the minutes following the decision, there were around 15,000 listeners – showing the extensive reach of this medium, which was no doubt being utilised by an ideologically diverse range of users.

Every few seconds announcements, meant for other police officers and emergency service people in Ferguson, crackled into my headphones. It was exciting. For those who weren’t able to listen, various users relayed information to the forum, remediating this official channel. *@Merk0331* posted fifty times, with updates such as:

‘Helicopter has to return for fuel

Barber shop being looted, Gas stations, restaurant, too.

Tear gas fired.

Fight in progress.

Several more shots fired.’

Soon enough, other live-streaming media sources came online, and SF members were quick to follow protester Bassem Masri’s audio-visual feed on USTREAM⁸³, which transported them into the ‘action’. Whilst WNs were constructing racist narratives out of the images

⁸³ A free online live video streaming service – www.ustream.tv

transmitted from Masri's phone,⁸⁴ Masri, a black protester, was demonstrating against police brutality and racism. This sort of contradictory remediation is a common occurrence in the digital age, where cross-cutting media are often memetically brought into uncomfortable proximity. To explore such remediation and circulation further, I turn now to SF members' use of memes, to argue that the moral panic is itself a memetic form.

Memesis: panic as meme

Memes, as they apply here, are a key mode of communication in the digital age (see, Shifman 2013; 2014). The transmission of ideas across vast distances has been accelerated by advances in digital media, and a relatively new creative participatory engagement with circulating discourses, signs, and symbols has emerged. Importantly, as Shifman (2013, p.4 emphasis in original) argues, 'like many web 2.0 applications, memes diffuse from person to person, but shape and reflect general social mindsets [...] in this environment, user-driven imitation and remixing are not just prevalent practices: they have become highly valued pillars of a so-called *participatory culture*'.

The generative and influential nature of internet memes is recognised by SF members, and efforts are made to (re)produce and (re)circulate WN iterations. When #handsupdontshoot⁸⁵ started trending online and off following the shooting of Michael Brown, for example, a counter-meme was circulated which parodied the original. The new slogan, #pantupdontloot, stood to undermine demonstrators by deriding (largely black) urban styles of dress and the supposedly

⁸⁴ 'I've been watching since [@Macromedia] posted that link and I'm pretty sure my IQ dropped about 40 points. Nothing but stupid babbling Negroes' (@Citizen 5981);

⁸⁵ A reference to witness accounts that Brown was shot whilst surrendering.

inappropriate performance of protest. The opportunity was seized by WNs, who set about remixing the meme. SF member, *@Harumphy Dumpty*, called for other users to engage in the dissemination of the meme by signing a ‘Pants up Don’t Loot’ petition on the White House website:

‘Don't just soak up the news and fellowship here without contributing to shifting the mentality of the mainstream by hammering our **STOP WHITE GENOCIDE** memes into the mainstream at every opportunity.’

Another user reworked the phrase in an image of Ferguson protesters displaying a neon banner so that it displayed a racist alternative (see Figure 11). This is a classic memetic engagement with a circulating cultural artefact, and allowed internet users to creatively engage with this discourse.



Figure 11 - Ferguson banner remixed memetically. Original on left. (sources: left - SigActs blog; right - posted by @Josey Wales)

The meme worked its way into almost every SF thread related to Ferguson, and stood as a shorthand for the arguments instilled in it. The implicit message is that if young African Americans could just conduct themselves in a civilised manner, then they would not be shot. Held within this perspective is the assumption that Michael Brown, among many others, deserved to be killed. The hashtag *#pantsupdontloot* is still in circulation – alongside other reactionary remixings of circulating progressive memes such as *#whitelivesmatter* or *#alllivesmatter*, in response to the *#blacklivesmatter* movement. Aside from the remixing of extant memes, there are two key types of meme circulating on SF, and extending outwards from

the Forum, which are particularly influential in WN discourse. The first is a set of phrases referred to on the Forum as ‘the mantra’ and the second is what I am calling the *panic macro meme*. I will now deal with each of these in turn.

The ‘mantra’

The mantra is a logically fallacious phrase (or series of phrases) which have been circulated by WNs online and off. A SF sub-forum titled ‘Swarmfront BUGS’ declares that ‘Anti-racist is a codeword for anti-White! Diversity is a codeword for White genocide!’ These messages are spread by SF members in the form of a copy and paste slogan in comment threads on news stories, youtube videos, Reddit threads, and so on, and documented in this sub-forum. In this way, repetition and refrain do the work of disrupting circulating discourses and narratives. @genseric, a strong proponent of WN memes encourages members to:

[share] the links to where you posted the Mantra or to the sites you hit with Mantra-thinking regarding White genocide [...] and you’ll get some covering fire from the Swarm.

In this way, SF members are notionally able to ‘swarm’ to the site of debate, to support their comrades by outnumbering dissenting opinions.

The mantra’s memetic quality becomes apparent in their ‘repackaging’ (Shifman in Jenkins 2014) for different platforms. An effort has been made to insert these phrases into everyday discourse through placement in banal settings. The message is carefully chosen to play to the white victim discourse, as opposed to explicitly white supremacist alternatives.

@Harumphy Dumpty explains the tactic thus:

When the terms ‘anti-white’ and ‘White Genocide’ have become part of everyday mainstream speech, by having been hammered into the mainstream through every available venue just as the word ‘racist’ was, we will have

recovered part of our freedom of speech about race and will be much better able to take the next steps.

This form of WN meme is pervasive – even finding its way into billboards and stickers displayed in physical spaces (Simpson 2015). This transition from online to offline circulation speaks to the sense of connectivity discussed in Chapter Five, displaying an awareness of the limits of the digital medium.

Outrage macro memes

The second important WN meme draws on one of the most common internet meme forms; the ‘image macro meme’. This model typically involves a central image, overlaid by formulaic text (see Figure 12). Successful (viral) image macros tend to incorporate humour, though this is not always the case. This memetic form is instantly recognisable to e-literates and is easily (re)produced using freely available software and websites. Importantly, here, providing a person has a degree of digital-cultural knowledge, these memes can be simply utilised and manipulated to produce any given narrative.



Figure 12 - Image macro meme (source:

<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/image-macros>)

As a result of their flexibility, image macro memes are used by individuals and groups across the political spectrum. White nationalists make use of this format to stimulate the feelings of fear, outrage, sympathy, and so on, which I have argued are integral to the WN project. WNs have produced a relatively novel form of the image macro which incorporates moral panic themes to produce a visceral reaction of outrage. More often than not, these outrage or panic macros involve the juxtaposition of smiling white victims

and monstrous images of their alleged attackers (see Figure 13 and Figure 14). This practice reproduces the communities of shared feeling discussed in the previous chapter, and reinforce the abstract racist stereotypes discussed in the next chapter.

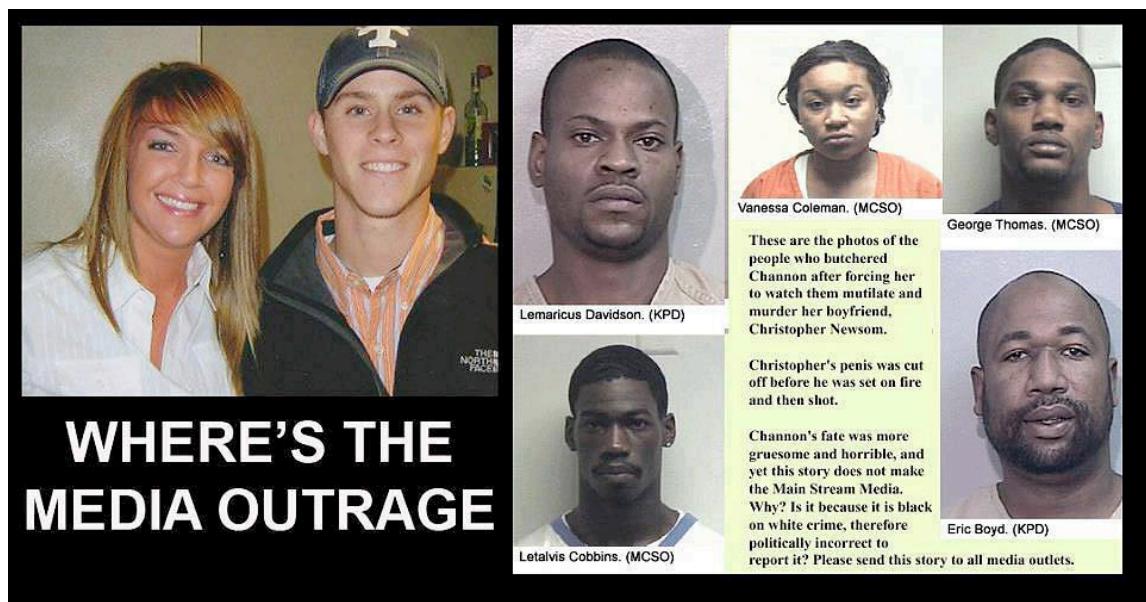


Figure 13 - Outrage macro meme (source: Stormfront)

Outrage macros are generally poorly designed, with too much text and jarring composition; though I would argue that this is part of their power. Their amateur starkness and cut'n'paste aesthetic give a sense of relatability – ‘this is someone ‘like me’ – as well as a vulnerability which must



Figure 14 - Outrage macro meme (source: Stormfront)

be protected.⁸⁶ Furthermore, the outrage macro often addresses the reader(s) directly, as in Figure 14, where ‘white people’ are directly challenged. Outrage macros are effective in provoking a reaction amongst ideologically committed members, but are also produced with an outward-facing agenda, which is lauded by one member on the Charleston thread:

I think the posting of all of the endless black-on-white hate crimes on this thread is a good thing. Many of these guests may actually be genuinely looking for a different angle on things and all these unreported/hushed up crimes may open their eyes. (@*Britannic Nationalist*)

@*Britannic Nationalist* highlights the number of ‘guests’,⁸⁷ and suggests that many may be sympathetic to the WN cause. The effort to manage the moral panic about racist violence is laid bare here. The tactic is to rearticulate circulating fears about white violence with the supposedly more prevalent ‘black-on-white’ form.

A degree of suspicion surrounding high numbers of guests is typical of WN and extreme-right fora, where paranoia bubbles close to the surface. As well as existing and prospective members, outrage macros are often targeted at oppositional lurkers. The meme depicted in Figure 15 below, for example, which claims that the six children – murdered by African Americans – were the ‘victims of multiculturalism’, was posted by @*Brushfire*, with the caption: ‘Liberals, feel free to shed tears and pass some of your moral outrage toward the murders of these kids at the hands of our equals.’

⁸⁶ This practice stands in stark distinction to the glossy *Dabiq* digital magazine put out by Islamic State (IS) for example (see, Rosiny 2015). Whether deliberate, or not, the amateur *ad hoc* nature of SF’s aesthetic practices (re)produces a sense of vulnerability, as opposed to IS’ efforts to perform a particular kind of state power.

⁸⁷ Unregistered and anonymous ‘users’.



Figure 15 - Outrage macro meme (source: Stormfront)

Here *@Brushfire* implicitly indicts (presumably white) ‘liberals’ with lacking compassion or outrage for white victims of violence. In this meme, a narrow conception of multiculturalism is articulated with racist notions of black criminality and liberal moral outrage to construct a seemingly ‘common sense’ teleology – liberalism → multiculturalism → violence against white children. The fallacious nature of this argument hardly needs to be pointed out here, but these arguments hold real power in the ‘echo-chamber’ of WN webspaces – perhaps highlighting the limits of remediation.

A couple of hours, and around 80 posts, after the Charleston thread was started, *@White Virginian* posted, saying:

I honestly wouldn't be surprised if the feds [law enforcement – FBI] are looming over SF right now...

This caution was countered almost immediately by *@Crest* who added:

+ 100 x [and one hundred times] as many new members who are about to wake up!

The circulation of panic macro memes is minimal – tending to be confined to WN fora such as SF. Whilst many lurking guests may be sympathetic prospective members, there is an acute awareness on SF that the space is monitored by media, law enforcement and anti-racists. I argue, therefore, that the profusion of outrage macro memes serves two key purposes beyond educative

interpellation of outsiders. First, and following Miltner (2014), these memes act as a constant ideological touchstone for active members – reaffirming members’ insider identity, (re)producing abstract racialized dichotomies, and maintaining the ‘critical mass’ – the ‘breath’ – of outrage necessary for repeated engagement. Second, as seen in *@Brushfire*’s caption to the outrage macro depicted in Figure 15, the memes are used for political point-scoring and ‘balancing’ what is perceived as skewed anti-white MSM coverage of racialized violence and to challenge ‘liberal’ attitudes toward multiculturalism. Whether this point-scoring is successful or not seems irrelevant here – the space and opportunity to produce alternative narratives give a sense of discursive power which, I would argue, helps to maintain the momentum behind SF.

Fugitive access to discursive struggle: Remediation and Stormfront broadcast

Remediation by MSM

As touched upon above, often during periods of racialized moral panic, Stormfront becomes a focal point for MSM attention (see, Dickson 2014; Nelson et al. 2015). Articles tend to present SF as the voice of organised racism, quoting members verbatim, often without robust critique. Indeed, in an article in *Vice* online, Conti (2015) states: ‘There’s no Official Racist Neo-Nazi Spokesperson, but there are plenty of places where these people gather to share their views’, before going on to reproduce quotes from SF and Vanguard News Network Forum. It is my contention that this remediation of SF users’ opinion and comment not only gives them access to the heart of discursive struggle, but also lends them a degree of legitimacy.

Furthermore, I argue that this representation of the ‘extreme outside’ removes attention from structural and systemic racism, whilst re-centring white voices (see, Kobayashi 2009 on this phenomenon). In one particularly egregious example, published by the *Huffington Post* following

the Charleston shooting, the authors uncritically quoted SF users, fulfilling the agenda of white nationalists:

A number of Stormfront members seemed to be aware that their site would be subject to scrutiny by the press.

‘We all condemn this sort of action,’ wrote sons of vengence. ‘We all despise it and think it cowardly. Make sure you write that on your next article about this incident!’ (Nelson et al. 2015)

This set up a *de facto* dialogue between SF users and lurking journalists. In this relationship, the authors are no longer purely reporting on the WN response to Charleston, but have become (re)mediators of that response.⁸⁸ Their reportage is deliberately manipulated by WNs to ‘manage’ the unfolding moral panic.

Where SF quotes are reproduced in the MSM *without* the deliberate efforts of users, the ‘work’ of active panic management is obviated, and this is reflected in WN responses. In the same *Huffington Post* article, @*WhiteVirginian* is quoted as stating: ‘Obviously I am very against this heinous act of violence, [...] Although a White guy going on a mass shooting is made such a big event because it happens so rarely. Blacks commit mass shootings everyday in every major US city.’ This effort to extend the franchise of the grievable, whilst undermining the gravity of the violent act by equivocation seems clearly directed toward other members of the forum. That this post is reproduced in the MSM, however, is seen as cause for celebration:

I am actually very pleased that my line made it into the Huffington Post, hopefully itll make some mindless Whites wake up (@*WhiteVirginian*).

⁸⁸ I am not arguing here, that *Huffington Post* readers receive and digest these ideas identically or favourably, but the fact that WNs managed to gain access to these MSM circuits of meaning-making is in itself significant. A study of the ideological effects of such remediation would be very interesting.

Here, the classic WN trope of the ‘un-awakened white’ is invoked to argue the value of MSM remediation – showing a degree of self-awareness around SF’s limited reach. Echoing @WhiteVirginian’s delight at being published, @LeonidasThe2 makes their intent clear’

[I’m very pleased] too [...] I want people to read it.’

Furthermore, the uncritical tone of the article is celebrated for dispelling the ‘stereotype’ of the white supremacist SF user:

I'm still shocked that The Huffington Post actually wrote a relatively objective, unbiased article about Stormfront. I mean the article basically points out that the vast majority of SF members are going against the mainstream media stereotype of ‘White supremacists’. (@WhiteMansBurden82)

The remediation of WN forum comments through traditional (if digitized) news media amplifies WN perspectives. As already argued, this process gives WNs a fugitive access to otherwise closed modes of communication. This is capitalised on by SF members and a concerted effort to engage in ‘dialogue’ with MSM or to place quotes is blatant.

Whilst the *Huffington Post*’s remediation of SF perspectives was considered a triumph by most users, some were less impressed with the article, taking the opportunity of increased Forum traffic to set the record straight through directly addressing ‘guests’. Following the article’s publication, in which @WhiteNationhood was quoted as posting: ‘This is going to be really bad, I’m afraid. Condolences to the families’, the user took exception to the description of SF users as white supremacists. In response, @WhiteNationhood edited the quoted post to include a clarifying addendum:

EDIT for Lurkers/Readers:

Since the lying press Huffington Post quoted this post, I just want anyone reading this to know some facts about me. I am not a white supremacist, as my username shows I am a nationalist who wants all peoples to have their own nations to preserve their unique heritage and history. This includes white Europeans in North America. I don't hate you. I just want to be left alone and leave you alone.

I am an American. I am a Christian. I am a Nationalist. I am a Socialist. And my condolences are sincere.

@*WhiteNationhood* presents some of the nuances of WN ideology here. The purification of space (Sibley 2002) is still at the core, in their desire to segregate, but a sense of vulnerability and humanity are present also. Due to the mediated nature of the Forum, and the sense in which it is often an exercise in public relations, it is hard to know how sincere such statements are. I explore this further in Chapter Six, but for now will turn to the broadcast nature of SF during such periods.

SF broadcast – ‘public relations’ – (Self)-censorship

As a result of the remediation discussed above, during periods of racialized moral panic, WNs attempt to ‘use’ the media by making public-facing statements. I argue that in such instances, this usually introspective forum ‘shifts gears’, turning outwards to become a WN broadcast node. Media events such as Charleston and Ferguson are seen as prime ‘opportunities’ (e.g. ‘the Ferguson opportunity’) for SF to make public statements on behalf of the wider WN movement.

I relly wish some people would realize that what they say is being quoted in the MSM [...] People need to look at things from a Public Relations perspective. By posting about major news stories like this, we are all (in effect) PR people for SF and the greater WN community. (@*Gilamut*)

Counter-intuitively, perhaps, there is a strong sense of censorship by moderators – and by extension, self-censorship by members. Indeed, @*Don Black* has produced a set of guidelines for posting (see Figure 16), perhaps giving an insight into the planned public-facing function of the Forum.

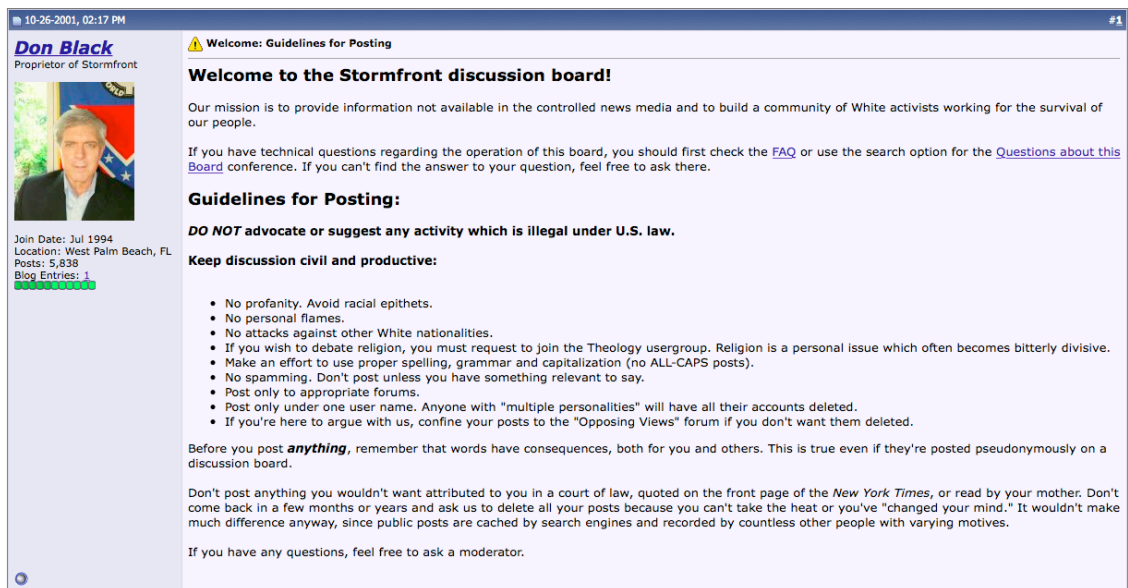


Figure 16 - Guidelines for posting (source: Stormfront)

These guidelines are enforced by human moderators, who delete offending posts, and a simple, yet effective, filtering system which replaces certain words with censored versions (e.g. 'nigger' becomes ***** - though some members get around this by typing 'nig*er'). A recent locked 'sticky' thread created by Stormfront's 'editor and chief of staff' is titled 'No profanity, no epithets on this forum' and argues: 'Vulgarity, profanity, and racial epithets do us no credit and such usage is strongly discouraged in this forum.' (@*Jack Boot*). It is clear that a professional image is desired on the Forum and imposed in a top-down manner. This implies an awareness of the increased scrutiny of SF and the reach of discourses which circulate there. The process of remediation outlined above brings SF members' usually marginal narratives into the mainstream. This is different, however, to the 'radical' media practice of 'native reporting' (Atton & Wickenden 2005).

Unlike 'radical media' practices, this process of amplifying marginal voices is not in line with a progressive project of empowerment. The, often uncritical, remediation of quotes from

SF brings the MSM into a problematic relationship with WN discourse, as a node in an explicitly racist broadcast network.

Entanglements of (white) power and resistance

In contrast to much of the literature, which positions resistance as an inherently progressive act (see, Sharp et al. 2000; Hollander & Einwohner 2004; Lilja et al. 2013), I propose that WNs enact and perform a reactionary form of resistance. Whilst WNs occupy a position of dermal privilege in the Euro-American context, they are also positioned outside of particular circuits of power as the result of stigma emanating from a conjunctural antiracism (which I will discuss further in Chapter Seven). It is from these complex, and often contradictory, positions that WNs encounter and engage with circulating racialized moral panics.

Here, Michel de Certeau's (1984, pp.35–7) binary distinction between the *strategies* of power and *tactics* of resistance are found wanting. Whilst strategies are described by de Certeau as commanding space and imposing order, tactics become 'an art of the weak' (p.37). Tactics are associated with otherness and a lack of official territory, which de Certeau argues gives them an opportunistic mobility: '[the tactic] must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open up in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse' (p.37). For de Certeau, the tactic must 'make do' (p.29).

The dichotomy constructed between strategy and tactic seems reasonable only in the abstract context of pure domination and subordination. In reality, the lines are blurred, and I want to argue, drawing on Sharp *et al* (2000), that these relationships are necessarily entangled; one *knot* in a nebula of multiple others. As Keith and Pile (2013, p.23) argue, drawing on Fanon's

discussion of the symbolic place of the veil in Algerian resistance to French colonialism: ‘the strategies and tactics of domination and resistance are intended to gain advantage over one another, but [...] moves in this war continually serve to re-contextualise and re-symbolise acts of tyranny and liberation.’ Importantly then, for Keith and Pile, ‘there is never one geography of authority and there is never one geography of resistance’ (p.23). This dialectic can be seen in the complex relationship of WNs to power.

On one hand, WNs are able to exercise what Sharp *et al* (2000, p.2) call ‘dominating power’, which ‘[attempts] to discipline, silence, prohibit or repress difference or dissent’. This practice is part of what Nakayama and Krizek (1995, p.295) describe as the ‘strategic rhetoric [of whiteness, which] is not itself a place, but [which] functions to resecure the center, the place, for whites.’ Returning, for a moment, to Fiske’s (1996, pp.5–6) forms of discursive struggle, it is against such strategic rhetoric that relatively subordinate groups struggle to ‘recover the repressed’ or ‘center the marginalized’. At the same time, however, SF users are stigmatized in a society where organized racism is no longer acceptable (see, Blee 2009). In dealing with this stigma, the Forum carves out a relatively anonymous space for the practice of what James C. Scott (1990, p.19) describes as ‘infrapolitics’. This, Scott argues, ‘is a politics of disguise and anonymity that takes place in public view but is designed to have a double meaning or shield the identity of the actors’. In this sense it is possible to see the dualism inherent in WN power relations.

A common articulation of the tangled *knot* of domination/resistance appears in SF reaction to racist violence. As discussed above, unfavourable moral panics – operating on the terrain of strategies – add to existing stigma surrounding white nationalism. However, where WNs are expected to celebrate incidents such as the shooting in Charleston, it is common for

contradictory narratives to emerge which serve to distance them from the act. This is noted by @WhiteisRight88:

If anything, this thread is most likely not going the way TPTB [the powers that be] would have liked. We all have for the most part agreed that this was a very cowardly and despicable act and we shun such actions even if it was done by a white. Just goes to show that we Whites actually have a heart and compassion. Unlike the neegroes that would no doubt be celebrating if this happened to a white church

The subversive act of negation resists the tendency of right-thinking elites to support or excuse institutional forms of racism by scapegoating WNs as the ‘extreme outside’. Importantly, however, in the process of tactically resisting the imposition of stigma by poaching a small victory in the interstices of power, @WhiteisRight88 reasserts the strategic rhetoric of whiteness. In this response @WhiteisRight88 condenses the strategic terrain of everyday white supremacy into the symbol of the heartless and indifferent ‘neegro [sic]’, in an effort to reassert a racist power dynamic.

Where the strategy ‘postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own*’ (de Certeau 1984, p.36 emphasis in original), the tactic must ‘[take] advantage of ‘opportunities’ and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings’ (p.37). The opportunism of SF is clear in the Forum’s reliance on the news-cycle and MSM to gain exposure. The quote which gives this chapter its title is indicative of this: ‘Folks, all this commenting is fine, but take a brief moment to use the Ferguson opportunity to spread our memes’ (@Harumphy Dumpty).

Stormfront’s media strategy is a manifestation of infrapolitical activity. Relatively anonymous, the forum generally allows for reaction without repercussion. In one sense, WNs tactically labour against the strategic power of the MSM – ‘making do’ with mediated accounts and giving in to the temporal logic of the media-cycle. At their disposal, however, is the sedimented weight of the history of racism and white supremacy (see, Bonilla-Silva 2006; Mills

2013), which can be deployed from a position of relative privilege, and therefore power, to challenge circulating moral panics.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have argued that new media has been an integral part of the recent development of white nationalism. Access to mediated circuits of knowledge production has given WNs an opportunity to influence and manipulate circulating narratives about race and racism. In this context, moral panics are essential to the WN movement's growth and continued momentum. Where panics are unfavourable to white nationalism – focusing on whiteness or racism – WNs have to 'manage' unfolding discourses in order to avoid further stigma or proscription. This management is often achieved through the deployment of the extant discourses of more favourable panics. Favourable panics here are the traditional moral panic form, propagated by right-thinking elites and perpetuating, in this case, racist stereotypes. Because of their pivotal role in the organising of SF, I argue that moral panics are the sustaining 'breath' of the WN movement; drawing members in and 'stoking the fires of anger', as Mark Potok of the SPLC put it to me in a personal interview. A large part of the day-to-day life of the Forum is built around discussion of selectively shared news events which show the victim status of whites in multicultural societies. The memetic (re)production of these discourses makes them easily digestible and maintains a critical level of disillusionment and anger.

Unfolding totemic media-events, such as the aftermath of the Ferguson Grand Jury decision, I have argued, are a key site of discursive struggle on SF. Through the convergence of old and new media, and the indiscriminate remediation of diverse sources, SF members are able to construct racist narratives in real time. During racialized media-events, I argue that SF 'shifts gears' turning from narrow introspection to outward-facing broadcast. This tactic takes

advantage of increased traffic to 'place' quotes in MSM accounts. The MSM are often quick to uncritically reproduce quotes from the forum and this 'dialogue' between them and SF, problematically turns those outlets into nodes in a WN broadcast network.

Finally, drawing on James C. Scott's (1990, p.199) concept of 'infrapolitics' I argue for a nuanced and entangled version of de Certeau's (1984) distinction between strategies of power and tactics of resistance. I argue that WNs are stigmatized in the current conjuncture, and, in this sense, are excluded from access to particular circuits of power. In challenging this stigma, through contesting or amplifying moral panics, SF members practise what I have called reactionary resistance. In the next chapter, I show how SF members deploy repertoires of race and morality in contingent and flexible ways. In doing so, I argue that such contingency and flexibility is of fundamental importance to both the contestation or amplification of moral panics, and to processes and practices of identity construction.

Chapter 6. 'NO ONE GRIEVES FOR US!': Repertoires of race and WN morality

Introduction

The preceding two chapters have teased out the complex relationships between connectibility, community, (re)mediation, and moral panic. In this chapter I explore repertoires of race on Stormfront through the lens of the three case-studies laid out above. I argue that, whilst race is notionally *the* foundational organising principle of SF, members often apply racialized categories in inconsistent and contradictory ways; highlighting the capricious nature of the construct.

In this section I examine the repertoires of race which circulate in WN discourse. First of all, I look at WN representations of 'whiteness'. Here I include those that are constructed as biologically white but are ideologically 'other'. I then go on to interrogate representations of 'the racialized other' and the contingency of these constructs. Here I argue that there is an important distinction drawn by WNs between the 'other' as abstract stereotypical object and as concrete grievable subject. In the examples I present, drawn from the three case studies, the latter is only deployed to describe dead bodies. I argue that this is because the assertion of humanity in death undermines abstract racist caricatures. In order to maintain racist abstractions, I argue, the contingency of race must be fixed – however ephemerally. I go on to argue that even in an explicitly racist community, racialized representations are contingent. To this end, I argue that Deleuzian antiracist efforts to proliferate race (see, Saldanha 2006), rather than abolish it, assume that race is fixed and static in racist discourse. However, as I show, race is always already contingent, owing to its perniciousness.

Racist stereotypes, based on abstraction and fetishisation (see Gilmore 2002), are most commonly deployed on the Forum. However, in response to certain incidents of racist violence, there is a counterintuitive turn away from racist constructs. Even oppositional movements must contend with hegemonic discourses, and the current ideological settlement contains within it the kernel of an anti-racist politics - however ineffectual it has proven (Amin 2010). It is my contention that WNs co-opt and assimilate elements of this in their contestation of racialized moral panic discourses.

Furthermore, I argue that this capitulation produces a strategic and flexible morality. As bell hooks (2013, p.11) observes, racist comments are often justified by reference to the 'bad black people', not the 'good' ones. For example, whilst violent and genocidal discourses are tolerated in reference to the overdetermined and abstract object of '*the Blacks*' or '*the Jews*'; the subjective response to violence against individual black people or Jewish people is often much more complexly framed in terms of legitimate (abstract and stereotypical) vs. illegitimate (concrete human) targets. In the context of Charleston, for example, the dead black bodies became concrete subjects, and were therefore allowed their humanity - even by WNs. The re-subjectification or (de-objectification) of the bodies ruptured abstract representations of blackness; though (re)asserted new representations - 'good Christian black people' rather than the negatively charged 'negro'. A similar story emerged in the case of Frazier Glenn Miller's victims. In the context of Michael Brown's killing, however, there was little empathy, and I argue that this is, in part, due to the ease with which the stereotype of the violent and innately criminal black male is upheld. The aggressor in this case, an agent of the state, 'defended himself' in the line of duty, whilst Brown was painted in much of the MSM as a thug (see, for example Barrabi 2014). To understand this, I draw on Mbembe's (2003, p.11) theory of necropolitics which asserts that 'the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the capacity to

dictate who must live and who must die'. According to Mbembe, this serves to '[subjugate] life to the power of death' (p39-40). I argue that in cases such as the killing of Michael Brown, the exercise of the necropolitical power of the state reasserts what Fanon (2008, p.82) describes as the 'crushing objecthood' of the black body. This objecthood, I argue, precludes the extension of grievability to such bodies – whilst seemingly sincere performances of grief by WNs can often be read as politically expedient and centred largely on perceived injuries to 'the movement'.

Representations of 'whiteness'

Whilst 'whiteness' forms the core organising principle of WNism, it is far from fixed. Debates about who counts as white are perennial on the Forum, leading to bitter schisms. Discussing an alleged retaliatory attack on a Bosnian man in Ferguson following the shooting of Michael Brown, for example, members were unable to agree whether he was 'really' white:

I know a lot of Bosnians, and they don't consider their selfs 'American white' as they say and they are Muslims. In Fact I hear them talk a lot of crap about white folks. (@WhereTheDawnBegins)

one can't be a Muslim AND a White man because the 2 are mutually exclusive. (@Darling Blade)

Someone's racial background alone determines if they are white or not. Religion doesn't. Christianity is just as non-native to Europe as is Islam. What you are doing is sowing internal divisions, and is destructive to the purpose of the website. (@Hungry Brain)

A man was killed because he was thought to be White. The only group arguing over his Whiteness are on Stormfront. There is a story in that alone. (@Great Australian Bite)

Such disputes are commonplace on SF, yet whiteness seems to largely evade neat categorisation. I am less interested, here, in tracing what Hughey (2009, p.929) has described as the 'Janus face of whiteness', and its construction by WNs (see, Winant 2004). Instead, I want to examine the representations of those who generally *are* agreed to be white on the Forum. In doing so, I have

identified three important white representational frames which circulate on SF during racialized media events – *white supremacy*, *white victimhood*, and *the treachery of the ‘unawakened’ white*. These are not exhaustive by any means – a forum devoted to discussing the ‘white race’ is bound to have multiple competing ways of talking about whiteness - however, I argue that the three identified below are integral to understanding responses to racist violence.

White supremacy

Whilst making claims to a non-discriminatory agenda of separation, white nationalism places ‘whiteness’ as morally and biologically superior to all other racialized groups. WN arguments are often built around the so-called innate qualities of ‘blackness’ and ‘whiteness’. The image of the strong and noble white man is still a powerful one, which is mobilised in juxtaposition to the morally depraved, criminal, and/or inferior ‘other’ – stereotypes which are often perpetuated in dominant discourse. It is perhaps unsurprising, given the reactionary nostalgia of WNism, that discourses of white supremacy in WN spaces have changed little in the so-called post-civil-rights conjuncture (see, Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich 2012).

Indeed, such nostalgia for the ‘good ol’ days’ of lynching or slavery often bubbles close to the surface on the Forum. Reacting to news of an alleged revenge attack on a white man in Ferguson, for example, *@CamilleInChicago* wistfully bemoans the lack of vigilante retribution:

There was a time in this country's history when the white men of the community would have been sawing and hammering away, building a certain structure [gallows] in the town square. Once it was determined that these four miscreants did indeed beat a white man to death, justice would be swiftly dispensed.

This statement positions the ‘white man’ of the community as the morally just patriarch and executioner. The euphemistic reference to a ‘certain structure’, however, may give some insight

into the discursive maneuvers which are necessary to deploying such explicitly violent rhetoric successfully.

Fantasies of violence are integral to WN discourse, and, though violent acts are often nominally denounced later, discussions of ‘race war’ abound on the Forum. Watching protestors in Ferguson, @*Celtictexan* declared:

I desperately want to see a race war start. I have a feeling all the problems of the White race might be solved once it does

Whilst @*Celtictexan* awaits the conflict, others argue that it has already begun. Condemning Dylann Roof’s actions, for example, @*Galen* argued:

I'm all for fighting our destruction, but basically [...] he is insane [...] What he did was this: he realised his home was being invaded by cockroaches, so he went outside and set fire to a honeybee nest. His choice of action can't be defended, and yes there is a race war, but when we get our White Nation, blacks like the ones he killed will be the first ones to peacefully leave.

These militarized discourses of invasion and defence, as well as the well-worn biological analogies, are commonplace on SF. They serve to reinforce hierarchical representations of self and other, and produce the imperative to protect the white body at all costs (I examine this construct in greater detail below). Furthermore, they produce a hegemonic discourse of symbolic and literal violence which is rehearsed and digested by members daily.

Beyond physical violence, the *symbolic* violence of abstraction saturates SF. Such abstraction ‘produces all kinds of fetishes: states, races, normative views of how people fit into and make places in the world’ (Gilmore 2002, p.16). Importantly, such abstractions also produce normative views of those who do not fit. In condemning protestors in Ferguson, @*AC SKIN* implicitly positions whiteness as morally superior, invoking Alabama’s segregationist ex-governor, George Wallace, to argue for separation:

They destroyed their town right before holidays. Unreal, no family values, no morals and zero self discipline. Segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever! [...] White Power' (@AC SKIN)

Other members were more explicit about the supposed superiority of whiteness:

Black americans can't compete with a healthy adjusted white. Even with affirmative action and countless social programs. They know it. I just hope other white people figure it out. Stop trying to understand why they do what they do. You're gonna hurt yourself. They want the white mans world without the white man. (@The Fellowship)

Reference to the 'white man's world' here lends weight to Gilmore's (2002, p.20) argument that America was 'conceived in slavery [...] and christened by genocide'. Upon the extension of suffrage to all white men in America, Gilmore (p.21) argues, 'Euro-American males established government as their milieu and state power as their instrument'.

Indeed, in showing their contempt toward Michael Brown and the protesters in Ferguson, @Tenniel and @Gothic33 invoke slavery as evidence of white paternalism, and black behaviour as an ungrateful rejection of white munificence:

Negroes should be down on their knees kissing the feet of White policemen -- and thanking God every day for American slavery which brought them to America and made them the richest, best cared for, negroes in the world and in all history. (@Tenniel)

The white man gives them economic opportunity by shipping them here. They destroy it. (@Gothic33)

These arguments represent the extreme conclusion of what Ghassan Hage (1998, p.87) describes as the 'symbolic violence' of presenting a mode of domination as a form of egalitarianism.

Taking this argument to its illogical conclusion, @2000 pithily asserts that 'Whites build, blacks destroy'.

Whilst much WN rhetoric attacks 'otherness' and presents 'whiteness' as superior, another common discursive device positions whites as an embattled majority. The perception of a demographic encroachment by racialized 'others' is pervasive and drives much WN rhetoric

and feeling. The popular slogan of the WN movement: ‘We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children’ (@*Satrat*) – or the fourteen words (14w) for short – is an example of this. As Ioanide (2015) asserts in the subtitle to *The Emotional Politics of Racism* – ‘feelings trump facts in an era of colorblindness.’ A sense of victimhood has become pervasive on the Forum, and seems to be a rallying point for members who feel marginalized and disenfranchised.

White victimhood

Increasingly, WNs have attempted to co-opt civil rights discourses of anti-discrimination to appropriate victimhood (Swain 2002). Contrary to pervasive violent discourses on the Forum, SF members often deploy a language of identity and equality to position their politics as defensive. Distancing the Forum from Glenn Miller’s lethal racism, for example, @SISwaffen (named after the armed wing of the Nazi party), disavowed violence:

What do most of us want? To hurt others? To be superior? NO! NO! NO!

We just want a White Identity, without being labeled, attacked, and worked against! Stop dehumanizing us! (@SISwaffen)

White identity, here, is not seen to be at odds with the denial of superiority, despite Nopper’s (2004) assertion that whiteness by its very nature relies on the iniquitous and exploitative history of racism and imperialism.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ See here, also, Wolfe’s (2016) work on the mutual constitution of brutal violence and whiteness in the history of the USA.

Reparations for the brutal injustices of slavery and affirmative action policies aiming to re-balance inequalities in employment and housing often come under attack by WNs as discriminatory against whites:

As White people, we are being disenfranchised directly and by disparate impact through government policies and targeted for violence by nonwhites.

We are the only group that is allowed to be freely criticized and mocked.
(@CatherineGrace)

Such sentiments, overlaid onto the nostalgic white supremacy above, reveal WN anxieties over a loss of status. These are clearly unfounded, as evidenced by the near-impotence of such policies to effect radical change and the continued strength of the so-called colour-blind ‘white supremacist state’ (see Bonilla-Silva 2006; Doane & Bonilla-Silva 2013).

Importantly, for a great many economically-deprived whites, acknowledgement of advantage and supremacy is rare – perhaps a consequence of the invisibility of whiteness and its associated privileges (‘other people are raced, we are just people’ Dyer 1997, p.1). Of course, in reality, as Hall (1980, p.341) argues: ‘race is the modality in which class is lived’, and a white working class or workless male is still better off than a black one (see Coates 2015; Grosfoguel et al. 2015). Indeed, white privilege according to McIntosh (quoted in Dyer 1997, p.9) acts like ‘an invisible knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear and blank cheques.’ Much blood and ink has been spilled in pursuit of problematizing whiteness and challenging its structural dominance. This is undoubtedly a threat to the ontological security of those disenfranchised whites whose ideology is implicitly predicated on the superiority – biological or otherwise – of the white race.

The victories of the civil rights movement, for African Americans, have been experienced as a painful loss by many poor whites who have historically, and often only theoretically, benefited from structural advantage:

@14words_of_truth: When I graduated from high school, the federal government had already made it illegal for a white man to be hired at any large business in the Houston, Texas area. [...] Everything is very bad and getting worse. Lots of the white boys graduating from high school have no future. They will never have a decent job, they will never get married and raise a family, and that is just what the anti-white federal government wants-- White Genocide.

→ **@garryowen:** You certainly won't get any argument from me that White kids nowadays no longer have any 'White Privilege', and that things are harder nowadays than they used to be.

Whilst it would be impossible to mount a legitimate argument against the existence of racialized oppression and privilege in the USA, for those who have profited and wish to continue, it is imperative to try. The concept of equality in WN discourse is loosely theorised as an evenly applied principle and a universal experience. In this context, a campaign such as #BlackLivesMatter is argued to be discriminatory and racist, rather than reclaiming the value of black lives in the face of a society in which they are disproportionately disposable (Coates 2015). Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2000, p.203 emphasis in original) describes this process as 'laissez faire racism' and argues that '[it] ideologically equalizes the races ("we are all equal!"), although in fact they remain unequal, [providing] the ammunition for Whites to feel *moral indignation, anger, resentment*, and even *hate* toward minorities and the programs viewed as providing 'preferential' treatment to them.' The logical end of this illogical flattening of rights is, of course, a sense of inequality and victimhood.

When news emerged that Dylann Roof would be charged with a 'hate crime', for example, comparisons were drawn with many incidents of 'black on white' violence in which the attackers had not been charged as such:

'When there are Knockout game attacks, hammer wielding attacks, throat slashing attacks, all black on white, there are no 'hate crimes' charges and no big media fanfare.' (@LoveTheWhites)

'Whites cannot be victims of a Hate Crime in this country. Why is that? Why does this notion of 'equality' reek of deceit?' (*guest user*)

The implication here is that whites are unequally treated in legal and popular representation. Such discourses draw on the 'space of truth' construct, discussed in Chapter Four, to position WNs, as conscious victims of a conspiratorial plot:

'What many of you fail to realize, partly because of your mindless denial of the holocaust, is that WE are the hated ones. We have been targeted for annihilation by the Jews and other non-whites, and they will not rest until we are extinct.' (@lucian_lacroix)

Whilst Jews and 'other non-whites' are argued to be targeting the white race, the number of notionally white figures who challenge the hegemony of whiteness disrupts neat binary narratives of whiteness and otherness. Indeed, WNs construct non WN whites as a particularly dangerous 'other'.

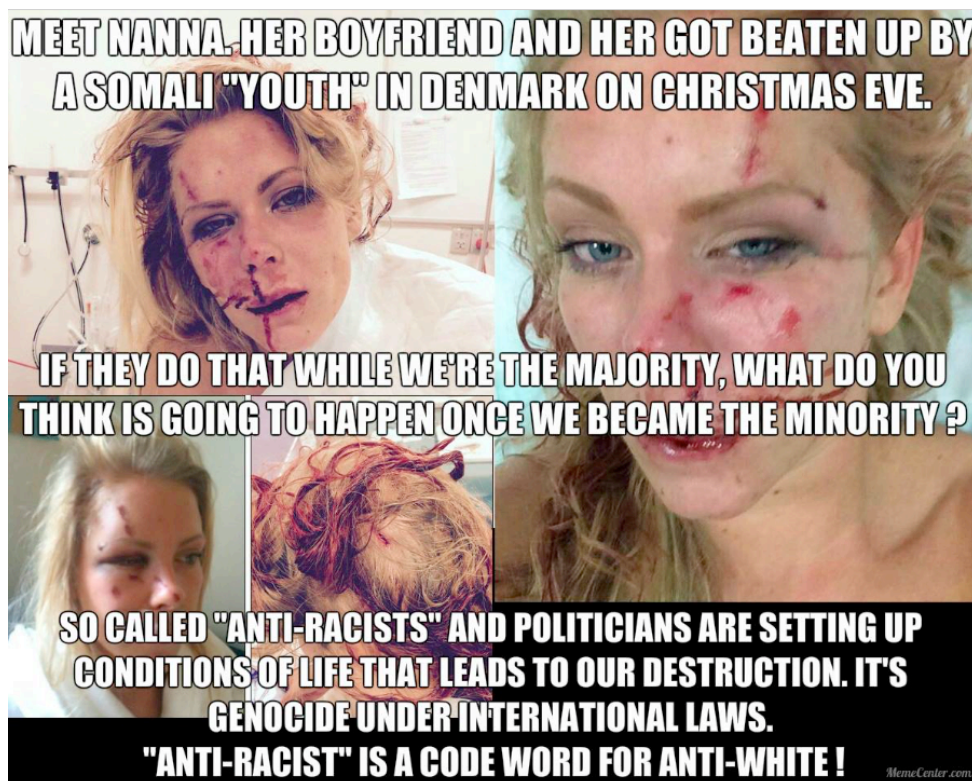


Figure 17 - Posted by @14words_of_truth - source: Stormfront

In the outrage macro presented in Figure 17, for example, images of a bloodied and bruised blue-eyed blond white woman are super-imposed with text describing her attack. The ‘Somali’ attacker is abstracted and absorbed into the ‘they’ of a violent and fearsome collective other. However, it is the reference to a shrinking white majority which I believe is meant to produce the most profound sense of panic. In this context, anti-racists and politicians are framed as more dangerous than those racialized as ‘other’, given their access to, and alleged exploitation of, the levers of power. It is clear, then, that such constructions of race do real ideological work.

The treachery of the ‘unawakened’ white

Whilst white nationalism is most commonly argued by WNs to hinge upon a biological reading of race,⁹⁰ in reality, their narrow and flexible notion of whiteness draws a boundary around a group of individuals who are ideologically similar but phenotypically diverse. I have shown, through reference to Ahmed’s (2004a) *Collective Feelings*, that this solidarity is, in part, produced through a shared orientation towards ‘others’. Outside of this ‘racial community’ lie ‘non-whites’, but also, importantly, the pejoratively titled self-hating and un-awakened whites – the ‘race traitors.’

WN constructions of race as contingent on ideological differences, as well as phenotypical markers, seems to undermine the biological and essential basis of race. Anger from WNs towards non-racist and anti-racist whites is based largely on the supposed treachery of

⁹⁰ ‘Whites must be fully genetically White to be White. Our biology must be right first, then other things may follow.’ (@vikingcelt)

those groups in spurning the WN community of collective feelings. WNism is understood by its adherents as a zero sum game whereby any ‘non-white’ advances are in direct competition with the future of ‘the white race’. In this context, any white who ‘question[s] their privilege and view[s] their role as confronting social justice’ is branded a ‘race-traitor’ by WNs (Carlson 2004, p.309).

I argue that this is due to a perceived undermining of what C. Wright Mills (1997, p.11) describes as the ‘Racial Contract’:

The Racial Contract is that set of formal or informal agreements or meta-agreements ... between the members of one subset of humans, henceforth designated by ... ‘racial’ ... criteria ... as ‘white’ ... to categorise the remaining subset of humans as ‘non-white’ and of a different and inferior moral status [...] in any case the Contract is always the differential privileging of the whites as a group, the exploitation of their [‘non-whites’] bodies, land and resources, and the denial of equal socioeconomic opportunities to them. All whites are beneficiaries of the contract, though some whites are not signatories to it.

It is those whites who are not signatories to the Racial Contract, and more specifically who have signed a notionally more progressive Antiracist Contract who are, in this context, perceived as a threat to the dominance of whiteness.⁹¹ For this reason, I argue, they are vehemently attacked on the Forum.

As SF members ‘gathered’ online to follow live footage of protests following the Grand Jury decision in Ferguson, much of the attention focused on the white demonstrators in the crowds. Members were disgusted to see their supposed kin renouncing their privilege, and turning away from a supremacist whiteness:

⁹¹ I am very wary, here, of seeming as though *I personally* place the success of antiracism in the hands of paternalistic and benevolent whites. This is expressly *not* how I perceive anti racism.

Any white person who agrees with these riots or stands with Negroids should be ashamed. This is disgusting and stupid behaviour. I really resent these obnoxious Negroids and right now I hate any white people who stand with them, support or associate with them in anyway. The anger at white people who have helped to bring this is boiling up. Negroids are going to act like the apes they are. Nothing to be done about that. Except separate. (@Bana Phrionnisa)

Many of the protestors involved are white college students from the surrounding areas. A bunch of anarchist Marxists. To me they are worse than any thug or gang banger (@Hurin Thalion)

To me, a White lemming race-mixing self-hating enabler is JUST AS BAD as a violent white-hating negro (@MyKidRanks)

more sickening than any black riot - look at all those traitorous white liberals. (@Macromedia)

In this moment of white rupture, discourses of white treachery circulated with a virulence that is more commonly reserved for racialized ‘others’. SF members posted comments advocating violence against white protestors on the basis of their supposed racial sedition:

Any white person out with these herds of animals is a race traitor and doesn’t deserve to live in this country. They deserve to get ripped apart by Negroes. (@Hurin Thalion)

Whites who support this swarm of criminal and scum deserve to be culled along with them [...] they need to get stomped into the ground (@DanInNY)

I hope those White Liberals I see in the crowd get a dose of dieversity from their ‘equals’. 🍌 (@whitepigeon)

Im really hoping some of the traitors get their teeth kicked in by these blacks there out protesting for. (@Paladin Steel)

Biological analogies are commonplace on SF and the language of swarms and herds seems to refer exclusively to ‘non-whites’. However, calls for violence are somewhat tempered in relation to black protestors, but are full-blooded and explicit here. Ironically, it seems easier for WNs to advocate violence against other whites than it is against other ‘others’. It is to those other ‘others’, and their representation by WNs, that I turn now.

Representations of 'the other' – abstract objects, concrete subjects, and flexible morality

WNism is based on a strict sense of authoritarian morality. That is not to say that this is by any means fixed and monolithic. It is, instead, flexible and contingent. WN morality, I argue, is driven, in part, by political expediency, and partly by genuine moral uncertainty. In this section I want to explore this flexible morality in WN reaction to episodes of racialized violence through examination of my three case studies. As discussed above, a counter-intuitive condemnation of Miller and Roof's attacks and a grief extended to the victims was dominant on SF, where criticism centred on the violent vigilante tactics as well as the 'civilian' targets. In the context of Michael Brown's fatal shooting, however, support for the white police officer who pulled the trigger was near unanimous on the Forum. I argue that WN morality, in relation to violent episodes, is contingent upon the victim(s), the aggressor(s), the (re)mediation of the event, and the WN response. To this end, this section interrogates representations of 'the other' through the heuristic framework of 'abstract objects' and 'concrete subjects'.

Here, I use the term 'abstract object' to define the subject position of 'the overdetermined other' in what Gilmore (2002, p.16) describes as 'the process of abstraction [... which] produces effects at the most intimately 'sovereign' scale, insofar as particular kinds of bodies, one by one, are materially (if not always visibly) configured by racism into a hierarchy of human and inhuman persons that in sum form the category 'human being' (p.16).

'Concrete subjects', on the other hand, are bodies afforded a degree of humanity and subjecthood. I argue, drawing on Sternberg and Sternberg (2008) that even in the explicitly racist WN movement, it is more difficult to hate an individual than an abstract group. Negative stereotypes are much easier to maintain at a (topological) distance. I extend this, in an attempt to

understand WN responses to racist violence and to the bodies which, in death, are configured into relations of power.

When I began writing this section, I initially structured it according to thematic headings of ‘abstract objects’, ‘concrete subjects’, ‘fixing race’, and so on. As I wrote, I realised that focusing on each separately made little sense, since they are so clearly dialectically entwined. Constructs of the concrete subject, for example, can only be understood in relation to abstract objects, and vice versa. Furthermore, condemnation of attacks on concrete subjects often revolves around the wasted opportunity to visit violence upon the abstract objects of racist fantasy. Instead of a thematic structure, then, I work through my case studies, comparing representations of the victims in Charleston and Kansas City, with those of Michael Brown. Where in the former two cases, vigilante violence targeted ‘civilians’ racialized as other, the latter involved legitimate state violence against an alleged criminal.

It is perhaps surprising that SF members justified violence in the case of Michael Brown, since this was an act of the state which Forum members are so opposed to. Furthermore, this support of violence was conspicuously absent in the context of self-professed WN attackers. In an attempt to explain this, I turn to Mbembe (2003) and Butler (2009) to argue that there is a necropolitics at play, which casts certain lives as more or less grievable or disposable. As a result, not all bodies are deemed grievable. Certain individuals, such as Michael Brown, are articulated into a necropolitical racial grammar which marks their bodies as dangerous objects deserving of destruction. Here, grief becomes a strategy which is expediently and pragmatically deployed.

Non-state WN violence against 'soft targets' – Roof and Miller

Whilst there are a number of key differences between Dylann Roof's attack on an African American Church and Frazier Glenn Miller's shootings at Jewish community facilities, there are important similarities which structured responses on SF. Both violent acts were perpetrated by WN actors outside the aegis of the state, both were proven to be ideologically driven, and both targeted 'civilian' populations. In both cases, SF users were quick to condemn the attackers. This was, in part, a public-facing exercise in stigma management as discussed above. However, a degree of moral outrage was clear over the choice of targets. The random and senseless nature of Miller's attacks was highlighted by members of the Forum, whose anger and sadness seemed directed toward the dead:

Its simple-minded and evil to celebrate the deaths of random presumably innocent Jews.' (@*treunwa*)

Any time that someone gets killed senselessly is sad. Who cares if they were Jewish?! (@*TheWhiteWolf1*)

Similar sentiments were expressed in response to the attack in Charleston, where the choice of a church came under particularly strong criticism:

I mean, you gotta beef with blacks, by all means, be vocal about it; like somewhere like here! But, shooting them, like that? How stupid. I feel sadness for the families. 😞 (@*WASPIInExile*)

True sacrilege. Condolences to the distraught Afros on the board tonight who lost their fellow worshippers along the path. (@*Craig Cobb*)

I've tried to be sincere and balanced toward both perspectives and I truly am sorry that these blacks lost their lives while praising the Lord and being spiritually edified. This truly is a senseless crime in the sense that the killer(s) seem to have had no idea about how morally reprehensible this heinous act was. (@*WhiteNationhood*)

Each of these quotes makes reference to the dead and/or their families, and I want to argue that it is this individualisation of the victims that allows for a humane response.⁹² Each of these members makes inflammatory racist statements elsewhere about the abstract object of ‘the blacks’ or ‘the Jews’, but confronted by the concrete reality of dead bodies ‘out of place’ are forced to extend to them a grievable subjecthood (more on this below). It is telling, I believe that @WASPInExile draws a distinction between being vocal about a ‘beef with blacks’ (in the abstract), and shooting individuals. As Sternberg and Sternberg (2008, p.45) assert: ‘the reason people may hate entire groups instead of a single person is that it is often easier to hate a group. When looking at an individual, it is too easy for people to see a human being who is more or less like themselves, who can feel happiness and pain, and who tries to get along in life, just like everybody else. It is much easier to empathize with an individual than with an entire group.’ This empathy is particularly clear in @SwordAndScripture’s effort to relate to the dead:

Being a CHRISTIAN, and a WN, I have to say that I condemn this violence against a church in the strongest terms. Don’t care who was sitting there that night

Here, shared experience – as well as the sacred target – briefly flattens difference for

@SwordAndScripture, who is able to extend humanity to the victims regardless of race.

The posthumous ascription of the victims’ concrete subjecthood in the examples above, served to ephemerally rupture the abstract representations of ‘the Jew’ or ‘the Negro’ which more commonly circulate on the Forum. However, many more Forum members extended similar concrete subjecthood to the victims by casting them as the *regular exception*, re-asserting the ‘crushing objecthood’ of racist stereotypes to those ‘others’ outside of the closed violent

⁹² This practice is not unique to racist media, as Campbell (2012, p.87) shows in his work which highlights the ‘individualising of the social’ in media accounts of famine.

context. For example, @Glacier and @Harumphy Dumpty showed genuine remorse for the way that ‘average Jews’ are characterized on the forum, but backed this up by juxtaposing ‘individual Jewish folks’ against the abstract figure of ‘the Jew’.

I agree that most normal people are repelled by some of the way Jews are talked about on here.... most of it is due to frustration and anger at what Jews do. In my case and many others' cases, *it isn't individual Jewish folks that get the brunt of the anger, but what those that are trying to rule the world do*. When it comes to your average Jewish person, I bear them no ill will until they start whining about ‘racism’, ‘anti-semitism’ or some other nonsense. (@Glacier – emphasis added)

The way Jews are talked about on this site repels most decent White people, and rightfully so. [...] Jews are a people who are currently doing much better than ourselves in the nasty Darwinian struggle between groups. [...] But many commenters go beyond that and clearly regard (or pretend to regard) the individuals of that group as walking abominations, which is absolutely absurd, since they fall in love, get married, have children they love, just like us. (@Harumphy Dumpty)

@Harumphy Dumpty’s reference to the human qualities of Jews here stands in distinction to the frequency with which the user posts ‘white genocide’ memes such as “‘diversity’ means chasing down the last white person’ which implicitly advocate for the forced expulsion of all ‘non-whites’ from so-called ‘white countries’.

Such contingent morality in WNism, then, often produces complex racisms:

We can win our struggles without debasing ourselves to the moral poverty of the Jews. People in assisted living facilities should be on nobody's potential terrorist list. (@ApricotMallow)

The elderly woman killed by Miller at the Jewish care home is separated from ‘the Jews’ as an abstract category (see Klug, 2013). This allows @ApricotMallow to exploit the negatively charged abstraction of *the Jews* (as generalised objects) in order to express sympathy for *a Jew* (as particular subject). A more explicit example of this complexity came in reaction to a poster who proclaimed that he would not feel sadness for the death of three ‘parasites’ (Jews). Responding, @TheWhiteWolf1 posted:

Two teenagers who were at the JCC [Jewish community centre] auditioning for a role and an elderly woman are 'parasites'?! Bankers and media moguls are the enemy, not ordinary Jews. Stop generalising everything and everyone and be realistic. (@TheWhiteWolf1)

The dialectical nature of the subject/object relationship becomes clear here. The tension between abstract and concrete representations of the 'other' carves out a space for the disavowal of racist violence, whilst maintaining a broad ideological commitment to white supremacy.

Once the identity of the three victims in Kansas City was ascertained – all were Christians – condemnation of Miller became even more vociferous. Miller's chequered past as an alleged informant, drug user, and 'race-mixer' was paraded, and theories of mental illness were invoked by many as an explanation of this 'un-white' behaviour. In a double movement designed to disarticulate WNism from Miller's actions and rearticulate an abstract reading of 'the Jew', @Mjornllir asserted that:

There is no possible way this fool isn't owned by the Jew. He only killed whites, he's a faggot and a traitor to boot. (@Mjornllir)

In this formulation, Miller's humanity and agency are denied to him through his representation as property, whilst responsibility for his actions is assigned to 'the Jew' as overseer.

Following public statements by the SPLC linking Miller to the SF, @Don Black moved to defend the Forum:

I noticed the Poverty Palace [the SPLC] is even trying to conflate Stormfront with the Miller story. We have attracted a few mentally unstable people amongst our 286,000 registrations. I wonder how many 'murderers are hiding in plain view' on Facebook and Twitter. (@Don Black)

In a similar manner to the approaches to media outlined above, a key defensive strategy of WNs, is to denounce violent racism as mental illness or 'obsessive hate', whilst claiming their own ideological leanings as a normal defence of culture:

Hard to avoid dingbats and crazies posting on any public forum. The moderators here do what they can to eliminate those problems. Most folks

here are disgusted by the actions of any predator upon the innocent, no matter what race they may be. There's a huge difference between those who value our race and culture, and seek to defend it, than those who are merely looking for an outlet for their obsessive hate. The latter are a blight to us. They always have been. (@Mike212311)

This defensive framing drives a wedge between Miller and the Forum, where the majority of members are argued to be good people who just love their race (see Ahmed 2004b on the reframing of hate as love).

In the context of Charleston, a clear distinction was made between 'good blacks' and the fantastical character of the 'ghetto gang-banger' black. The spatiality seems significant here: whilst the church was held as a sacred space of non-violence, the same victims killed in the street in a black neighbourhood was considered to be fair game. Many SF members suggested legitimate alternative sites of violence which drew on favourable moral panics in an attempt to amplify them:

One thing I don't understand is his choice of victims. Obviously, murder is unacceptable but killing mostly elderly people in a church is just cowardly and repulsive. I'd have some respect for him if he gunned down some gangbangers which are not difficult to find among black people and are not 'innocent' in a literal sense. (@J Civello)

Choosing a church full of Uncle Tom's and other old fogey's ain't exactly the hallmark of courage now is it? Reminds me of that Miller dude who went ballistic at a Jewish assisted living centre and managed to kill 3 Whites. My guess is he just didn't have the guts to go into the ghetto where the gang bangers would have been armed and he would have been unlikely to get out alive. Having said that I ain't gonna lose no sleep over a few dead Jigs are you? (@Darling Blade)

Killing people in a church is kind of cowardly, no matter what race attends it. He should've gone in the projects or negro neighborhood and picked out some thugs, gang members, drug dealers etc. and shot them up at least he would've eliminated some authentic criminals and that would've been more positive. (@LusoAmerican)

If you want to shoot Muds, wait until they riot like they did in LA or Baltimore and then go weapons free. That's race war. Shooting up a bunch of civilians in a church is evil, cowardly and worst of all, counter productive. (@CelticUrbemensch)

Even if it's a black church some boundaries must be respected [...] If it had been a night club or rap place where adults hang out and sing about killing white people I would be more likely to believe a nationalist might have done this (@Paladin Steel)

In this context, I argue, drawing on Hall et al (1978, p.19), that each of these constructions of dangerous 'otherness' '[connotes] a whole complex of social themes in which the 'crisis of American society' [is] reflected'. This allows members to reproduce racist discourses – fixing 'real' blackness (the gang-banger, the drug dealer, the criminal) in 'real' black place ('the ghetto', 'the projects', 'the nightclub') – whilst condemning violence against exceptional 'good blacks' (see hooks 2013). Such imaginative geographies of problematic blackness are well-worn, and indeed commodified, in popular culture (see, hooks 1994; Collins 2006; Bonilla-Silva 2012).

A similar attempt to fix race was deployed to distance the WN movement from the shooter by racializing him as 'other'. In condemning the shooting in Charleston, @LeonidasThe2 tacitly aligned whiteness with WN consciousness:

sounds very cowardly. No real WN would do this. Its lower than the negroes who sneak up on people and 'knockout game'⁹³ them. Its not what a real white man would do

Here @LeonidasThe2 explicitly sets the 'real white man'⁹⁴ against 'the negro', and implicitly against the 'cowardly' shooter. Importantly, race in this formulation is defined by actions and ideology rather than biology, allowing @LeonidasThe2 to distance SF from Roof in ways which are politically expedient, for reasons discussed above.

⁹³ This refers to the racialized moral panic in the US over the past few years, around a game where an attacker attempts to knock out a random person in the street. The 'game' has been attributed to young black men and has become a shorthand for talking about black aggression and criminality in certain circles.

⁹⁴ And *man* is key here; much of what it means to be white in WNism is bound up with notions of hyper-masculinity and patriarchal honour (see, Blee 1996; Blee 2003).

It is essential, I argue, for the WN movement to disavow these violent acts and distance themselves from the attackers. Since the current conjunctural settlement incorporates a degree of antiracism – deployed largely against non-state actors – WNs realise they must contend with this if they are to be successful. In the context of Michael Brown's killing, however, a very different set of rules applied.

State violence against 'deserving targets' - Ferguson

Where the 'innocent' victims in Charleston and Kansas City were afforded their subjecthood, in the case of Ferguson, Michael Brown's 'guilt' sealed his abstract objecthood from the beginning. Following his shooting, discourses circulated on SF which sought to support Officer Darren Wilson, and justify the teenager's killing.

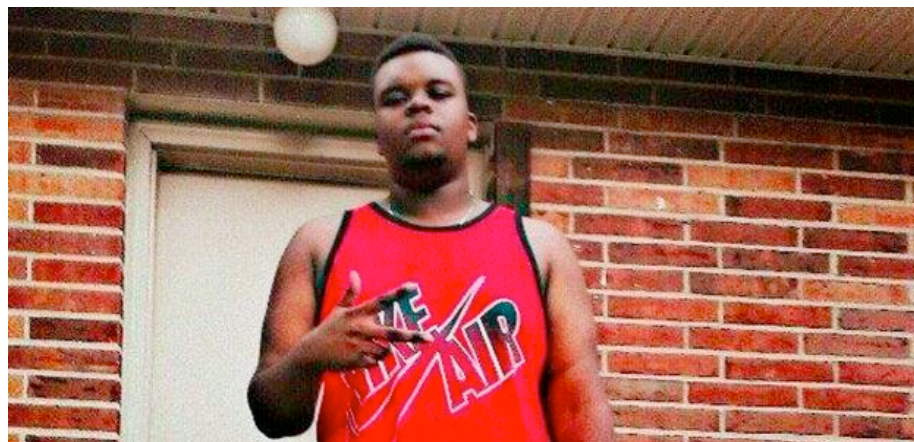


Figure 18 - Michael Brown (source: Stormfront)

Posting the photograph in Figure 18, *@WhiteRights* commented:

Here's the 'innocent child' Michael Brown. Funny how often he's wearing the gangbanger color red.

Here, white fears of gang violence and crime are posthumously projected onto Brown's body by *@WhiteRights*. Even in death, Brown is objectified as an abstract racist stereotype, and as a

consequence denied his humanity. As Slavoj Žižek (2008, p.38) argues, ‘the tortured subject is no longer a neighbour, but an object whose pain is neutralised, reduced to a property that has to be dealt with in a rational utilitarian calculus (so much pain is tolerable if it prevents a much greater amount of pain).’ In the context of the shooting of Michael Brown, his criminality was perceived to be dangerous enough to warrant neutralising for the sake of the ‘greater good’.

As if to prove Brown’s guilt, *@Southron Blood* recounted a personal encounter with police:

I got stopped once and had my license in the console of my vehicle. The officer asked me for it and I told him where it was. I kept my hands on the wheel and waited for him to tell me to reach for it before I made a move. It is common sense to not make a quick or unexpected move when the police stop you. Ultimately, it's because of black and Mestizo crime that police are so on edge about that type of thing. Yet to the Left, it's because of 'white racism'. There must always be a reason to blame whites. (*@Southron Blood*)

In this encounter *@Southron Blood's* (presumably white) body moves appropriately – follows ‘common sense’. Brown’s black body, by implicit contrast, moved in the wrong way and felt the consequences. As Fanon (2008, p.83) asserts:

In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty. I know that if I want to smoke, I shall have to reach out my right arm and take the pack of cigarettes lying on the other end of the table. The matches, however, are in the drawer on the left, and I shall have to lean back slightly. And all these movements are made not out of habit but out of implicit knowledge. A slow composition of my self as a body in the middle of the spatial and temporal world – such seems to be the schema. It does not impose itself on me; it is, rather, a definitive structuring of the self and of the world – definitive because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world.

Michael Brown’s out-of-placeness, his alleged criminality, and his ‘threatening’ movement placed his black body in a transgressive relationship to the white world.

Following Žižek, Ioanide (2015, p.21) argues that: ‘[despite] transgressions of the law and the state, most people continue to repress their desires to transgress (and the illicit enjoyment

such transgressions yield) by relinquishing their power to the state. In doing so, they obtain the pleasure that comes from transgressing acceptable norms vicariously through the state's authority and practices.' Drawing on Mbembe (2003), I want to extend this formulation to argue that in violent incidents where the state is identified as the aggressor, a necropolitical imperative is often held by WNs as a form of justification. State-sanctioned (self-defence) and state (police) violence against black 'criminals' is legitimised in necropolitical terms as the expression of sovereignty, thus inscribing the wounded or slain body into the 'appropriate' position in the order of power (Mbembe 2003). Indeed, Ioanide (2015, p.16) asserts that: 'people's justifications of racist, nativist, and/or imperialist acts often rest on the belief that these acts are necessary for the sake of a greater good or that people should be punished for betraying the implicitly sacred and extrapolitical values of the United States.'

In order to make arguments about separation or genocide, otherness must be fixed and stabilised, at least temporarily. This is achieved through the process of abstraction discussed above. The dead black body of Michael Brown was easily cast as a 'hood rat' or a gangster in order to justify violence:

I'm watching this black circus on CNN and the reporters have been saying things like 'Mike Brown's legacy' and 'Mike Brown's memory'. Good grief! Black hood rats get posthumous fame in the US by attacking cops and getting killed for their trouble. It's all so gd stupid it beggars description. Frickin' Negroes. It's a real life black plague! (@Woodsy)

In an effort to further seal Brown's objecthood, members attempted to exploit abstract representations of blackness as inherently violent and criminal:

Brown got what any thug, whatever the color, deserved and the cop was doing his job. The jury decided the merits on the evidence, forensic and witness, and decided Wilson acted within the law. But that's not good enough for them [black protestors], not when a mob of savages is out for free goods and a bonfire, ready to intimidate any voice of reason. Shameful people, they shame their whole race in truth, if that is possible. (@The Celtic Sword)

Another thug, exactly like Trayvon Martin, the 'no limit nigga',⁹⁵ as he billed himself! If you live like a thug, you will die like a thug. It is simply a fact of life. Drop the gun, extinguish your blunt, pull up your fag prison pants, and get a job!!! (@Ravening Wolf)

Whilst @The Celtic Sword moved to undermine protests surrounding Brown's death by juxtaposing savage mobs against the impartiality of the jury, @Ravening Wolf attempted to articulate Brown's killing with the murder of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin in Florida in 2012. Unarmed, Martin was shot as he walked home from the shops by a neighbourhood watchman on the gated estate where they both lived. The attacker was acquitted after a jury found there was not enough evidence to charge him with a hate crime. Whilst the case revived perennial conversations about racism in the USA, the racist right saw the verdict as an encouraging sign that certain bodies were still inherently disposable. So-called unemployed 'thugs' seemingly threaten the social fabric of America enough, that their extermination is legitimate.

Mbembe (2003, p.21), writing on slavery, argues that 'the slave is [...] kept alive but in a *state of injury*, in a phantom-like world of horrors and intense cruelty and profanity' adding that 'slave life, in many ways, is a form of death-in-life'. I contend that that this experience of a 'state of injury' can be extended to African Americans in contemporary American society. In the context of necropolitics, according to Mbembe (2003, p.27), 'sovereignty means the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is *disposable* and who is not.' The historical racist designation of black bodies as disposable, I argue, drawing on Coates' cautionary memoir, brings black people closer to death. For example, Coates (2015, pp.9–10) writes that:

the police departments of [the USA] have been endowed with the authority to destroy [black bodies]. It does not matter if the destruction is the result of an unfortunate overreaction. It does not matter if it originates in a misunderstanding. It does not matter if the destruction springs from a foolish

⁹⁵ A reference to Martin's Twitter handle.

policy [...] and destruction is merely the superlative form of a dominion whose prerogatives include friskings, detainings, beatings, and humiliations

Coates goes on to argue that the police decision to leave Michael Brown's corpse lying in the street for hours after his death was 'like some awesome declaration of their inviolable power' (p.11) – part of 'the long war against the black body' (p.98). Indeed, Goldberg (2014, p.34) argues that racism is constitutively related to a necropolitics because: 'the humiliations, degradations, indignities, and modes of exclusion constituting racisms directly or indirectly foreshorten life'. With this in mind, I argue that one of the definitive factors in WN acceptance and support of Michael Brown's killing – in contrast to the condemnation of Dylann Roof and Frazier Glenn Miller – is the involvement of the state and the necropolitical designation of black lives as disposable. The *de facto* legitimacy of the state as arbiter of vital value – even in the counter-hegemonic discourse of SF – provides a degree of vindication for WNs to support racist violence.

Commenting on Brown's death, the seemingly 'inviolable' power of the state to take life in the pursuit of some mythical 'greater good' was lauded by SF members, who lent support to Officer Wilson:

Personally , May I extend an invitation of solidarity to Officer Wilson ? In defense of himself and for upholding the oath he was given ; KUDOS. JUSTICE WAS SERVED! (@Rip59)

Now we have a situation where white people are bashed, murdered, raped by blacks on a daily basis and the liberal media is silent while a white police officer on duty shot a thug to save his own life and the media go into a feeding frenzy. (@LesPatterson)

Darrel Wilson is a good cop and was DOING HIS JOB.'
(@WisdomHonorStrength)

The shooting of loathsome fugly demonic negro thug Michael Brown was wholly justified. And if the police have to shoot libtard protestors too, then so be it. (@Peace Through Stormfront)

The discourses of oath, justice, and duty here aim to justify lethal force by articulating Michael Brown's killing with the necropolitical logic of state-sanctioned murder.

Indeed, the seemingly inviolable power of the state is perceptively summed up by

@EricPowers:

The Police can basically do whatever the **** they want to in America. The Entire Justice System is geared toward protecting Police after they use deadly force, it really doesn't matter the circumstances. The only time where you might have a semblance of an investigation and perhaps an indictment is if a Wealthy White person or Jew gets killed, but Police know better than that, they no there are basically no consequences for killing a minority or a poor person.

This inequality is captured chillingly in *@Oblakhan's* implicit assumption that the police act as a form of necessary pest-control:

If they charge Wilson every cop in the country should call in sick and keep calling in until the people are crying and begging them to come back and shoot more negros. The whole Ferguson police department should quit and go somewhere else to work. Let the scum over-run the city, and let Whities living there take matters into their own hands. They can do a better job than the handcuffed police. (*@Oblakhan*)

The discourse of over-running – a kind of infestation or contagion – constructs a pseudo-biological threat (see Comaroff & Comaroff 2001). Constant reinforcement of this disgusting abstraction serves to produce an affective response of distancing (Ahmed 2004b). In this context, the ability to grieve is severely curtailed.

Grievable Lives?

Finally then, I want to draw on Butler's (2009) work on 'grievable life' to further examine WN morality. I do so to problematize the seemingly altruistic sympathies of some SF members by highlighting what I argue to be their expedient deployment of grief. In approaching grievability, Butler argues that: 'specific lives cannot be apprehended as injured or lost if they are

not first apprehended as living' (p.1). In other words, humanity must be extended to particular bodies and/or groups before they become legitimate subjects of grief and mourning. Dehumanizing racist abstractions – if maintained, as in the case of Michael Brown – make grieving near impossible, as Fanon's (2008, p.82) 'crushing objecthood' seals the overdetermined body into its fate.

From the preceding discussion, it should be clear that the conferring of subjecthood reinforces racialized power relations (see Hage 1998 on the 'white managerial imaginary') and WNs inhabit a position from which it is possible to grant or deny subjecthood to 'subordinate others'. I argue here that, whilst some SF members display what appears to be genuine grief for the victims of racist violence, many more express a more cynical and expedient grief which relates back to the management of stigma discussed in Chapter Five. Finally, I argue that in both cases, WNs are either forced to capitulate to, or to assimilate a degree of, conjunctural antiracism.

In responding to the racialized violence outlined in my case studies, SF members expressed varying degrees of grief/mourning. On one hand, grief is expressed for the subjectivised individual victim(s), who – in death – are granted a degree of humanity and become appropriate subjects for mourning. On the other hand, is a more pragmatic and expedient grief for the WN movement and the injuries endured during such unfavourable moral panics. It is undoubtedly true that in certain cases, members feel genuine sorrow toward concrete subjects – however incongruous this position may be, given the violent ideology espoused on the Forum. I argue, however, that much of what appears at first glance as simple expressions of sympathy for victims of violence, may also reflect a lament for the movement and the ontological dislocation produced in these moments of rupture.

Reacting to the attacks in Charleston, for example, members of SF posted messages which juxtaposed grief for the victims with a mourning for the movement:

Condolences to the families of the dead. A church full of christian black people is most likely NOT our enemy. This was not only senseless, it can and will be used as propaganda fodder. All the 'evil racist' whiteys and the second amendment will be under full bore attack. (@Huginn ok Muninn)

My condolences to the families of the victims of this cowardly act [...] Sadly this will be used by the left/media to create even more racial strife... and as a way to take guns from law-abiding citizens. (@Glacier)

Whilst @Huginn ok Muninn and @Glacier initially express sympathy with the families of the dead in Charleston, this seems precipitated more by the potential injury to WNism and the American constitutional right to bear arms, than by genuine remorse. Condemning Frazier Glenn Miller, @kayden expressed similar grief for the movement and the potential advances of anti-racist organisations:

I cringe to think how the enemy will use this to smear us as something we are not, and also how much money scumbags like that at the SPLC will raise through the fear they drum up over what Mr Miller did today – again, many steps back we take today

Such performances of grief display an inherent understanding of the moral repugnance of these violent acts, and the damage that they do to a movement which is desperately trying to manage its further stigmatization.

Whilst members moved to condemn Dylann Roof's violence, many took the opportunity to rationalise his actions:

I am truly sorry for the people who lost their lives and their families. The only caveat is I wonder how many of those people in a self segregating (dare I say racist?) Church would have cheered if this had happened to YT [whitey – i.e. a white person] (@Just Us)

I am also sorry for those nine blacks, maybe it was not bad blacks. BUT. But the Jewish mass media were silent about the hundreds of thousands killed and raped white men and women in the past 50 years. (@Vladimir SS)

In these statements, the individual victims are cast as exceptional, and the murders are articulated into the ongoing historic moral panic surrounding black criminality and innate violence.

Given the broadcast media-strategy discussed above, and the awareness of a monitoring presence, some members were quick to censor such statements of justification:

I probably feel the same way as a lot of people in this thread do, but I have to wonder if lurkers aren't reading this site now [...] I'm not sure gloating over dead Semitic seniors puts us in the best light (@*WhiteNationhood*)

Express your condolences. Period. (@*SwordAndScripture*)

Here it is important that such stage-managed empathy should be seen as a reaction to the challenges that episodes of racialized violence pose to WNs rather than a neutral and sincere mourning for lost life. Grief is mobilised in pragmatic and politically expedient ways.

Far more common on the Forum is the grieving for white bodies. In the case of Michael Brown, as shown above, the young black body is articulated into a necropolitical regime representing criminal blackness as deserving of death. For example, @*drifter45*'s remorse is extended only to Officer Wilson:

It is utterly astounding how they can portray him as an innocent victim when he is captured on video strong arm robbing a store. It pains me to see the police chief and officials having to go on TV and say that they are sorry for the loss, for the family of brown and this tragedy yada yada. The thug tried to get wilson gun and kill him with it. The tragedy is that wilson now has no job and his life is utterly ruined. WHERE is the justice here? Where is justice for wilson? He is the only victim in this case.

Whilst this seems a more egregious example of white supremacist rhetoric than those above, I would argue that all share a similar orientation to 'the other'. All of these examples place the 'other' as something to be negotiated in the advancement of whiteness. The discourse of white victimhood reproduces white supremacy in insidious ways. @*Melanie Rose* sums this up perfectly in her response to sympathy toward the victims in Charleston:

Let the non-whites grieve for their own. We will grieve for our own. After all,
NO ONE GRIEVES FOR US!

@Melanie Rose's comment neatly encapsulates the invisibility of whiteness and its associated privilege whilst reasserting the essential differences between 'whites' and 'non-whites'.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have explored repertoires of whiteness and 'otherness' on Stormfront to better understand the contingent and flexible morality of WNism, and the consequences of this for WN repertoires of race. During episodes of racialized violence, representations of whiteness seem to cohere around three framings. White supremacy is the logical representation of self for WNs, whose ideology is based on the advancement of the 'white race'. Increasingly, however, discourses of victimhood have been deployed to justify the WN 'project'. This strategy leads WNs to co-opt civil rights discourses of anti-discrimination toward reactionary ends (Swain 2002). One of the perceived sources of discrimination felt by WNs is the liberal or 'unawakened' white, and this is the third representation of whiteness which is invoked during racialized media events. These non WN whites are viewed with particular contempt, largely, I argue, because they serve to undermine the community of shared feeling which reproduces hegemonic whiteness.

Where 'the other' is concerned, representations are equally contingent. In episodes of violence committed by WNs on 'soft' or 'civilian' targets, humanity and subjecthood are provisionally extended to victims, allowing their bodies to become grievable. In the context of state and state-sanctioned killing, the same subjecthood is often denied. I have argued that this is, in large part, due to a necropolitical regime which serves to objectify black bodies and justify their extermination. Following Butler (2006; 2009), I argue that certain lives are cast as more or less grievable. In this formulation, the black body which is sealed into the objecthood of racist

abstraction becomes less grievable than those which are apprehended as concrete subjects. However, even seemingly sincere grief for victims of racist violence can be read as a pragmatic and politically expedient response to conjunctural antiracism. Furthermore, explicit grief for victims, often frames a deeper grief for the injuries to the movement of morally unjustifiable racist violence.

Through this chapter, I have argued that repertoires of race on SF are contradictory, messy and contingent. I have also shown that, at key moments, an attempt is made to temporarily fix such representations in order that they might be put to work by racists. The creative plasticity of race in racist discourse, I argue, undermines Saldanha's (2006) suggestion that '[race] should not be eliminated, but proliferated, its many energies directed at multiplying racial differences so as to render them joyfully cacophonous.' Proliferating race is clearly not a uniquely progressive antiracist agenda, and, rather than undermining racist discourse, may clearly be used to strengthen it. With this in mind, in the next chapter I discuss the conclusions of this thesis, and suggest some tentative directions for a digitally-inflected antiracist research praxis.

Chapter 7. Toward a digitally-inflected antiracist praxis

I began this thesis with three stories and their circulation on a WN forum. Using SF as a lens, I have examined in greater detail this circulation and its strategic role in the workings of the WN movement and racism online. I have argued that Stormfront represents a topological network of WN connectibility, allowing likeminded activists to come together in relative anonymity. In this sense, I contend that materialities and topologies of connection – the more-than-digital geographies – require attention for a digitally-inflected antiracism. Here, I advocate for the development of alternative antiracist spatial imaginaries which disrupt or undermine racist communication and circulating discourse.

This thesis is built around three thematic empirical chapters. These explore the themes of: *topology and geographies of the digital*; *media and moral panic*; and *racism, morality, and the contingency of race*. In this concluding chapter, I will recap my arguments under each thematic heading, teasing out the areas of connection and the theoretical contribution of this thesis. Finally, I reiterate the contributions of this work, before highlighting the parameters of this study.

Topology and geographies of the digital

In this thesis, I draw on Serres and Latour (1995), as well as more recent work in geography (Allen 2009; Allen 2011; Latham 2011; Shields 2012; Lury 2013; Hinchliffe et al. 2013; Dixon & Jones 2015; Lata & Minca 2016), to set up a topological conception of digital networks. Here, I focus on connectibility rather than proximity to show how the forum allows members to form close connections with likeminded activists without many of the risks associated with face-to-face meetings. I show that the WN movement has fragmented in the digital age, largely shifting from offline collective politics to individual online politics. However, I argue, extending

Back's (2002a) early work, that this potential for relatively anonymous connection has allowed WNs to construct translocal spaces of 'collective feeling' (see, Ahmed 2004a) around what I describe as a sense of 'righteous truth'. Such spaces, I argue, following Ahmed (2006, p.122), produce a 'being in common' which serves to orientate WNs toward each other and against a host of racialized 'others' – reproducing racialized difference.

Throughout this thesis, I also examine more-than-digital spatial imaginaries deployed by SF users. Here I contribute to a digitally-inflected antiracist praxis by advocating for a topological sensibility toward 'digital spaces.' I problematize the macho antiracist discourse, propagated by the SPLC, of 'smashing' racist webspaces, by pointing to their assembled and rhizomatic nature. In doing so, I employ and extend work on the materiality of the 'virtual' (e.g. Kitchin & Dodge 2011; Horst & Miller 2012; Kinsley 2014) to argue for attention to more-than-digital materialities. Through telling the story of SF Italia's closure and the arrest of the sub-fora's moderators, I show what happens when the 'cyber' 'touches down'. Tracing the moderators' continued communication with the Forum from prison, however, I show the value of the Forum's flexible connectibility. In examining the embodied and emplaced experience of members, I show that the strengths associated with the topological nature of 'cyberspaces' – anonymity, connectibility, translocal solidarity – are vulnerable to weaknesses or hostile interventions at various points of the assemblage. Indeed, it is these potential points of rupture which I argue can be exploited by antiracists.

In this way, my work goes beyond current conceptualizations of what Ash, Kitchin, and Leszczynski (2016, p.12) describe as 'the materialities of digital computation', and 'non-human infrastructure.' There is already much important thought on the materiality of the digital, including work on: algorithms and codes in everyday spaces (Kitchin & Dodge 2011); the 'digital materiality' of design (Pink et al. 2016); and the physical material infrastructure of the digital

(Blanchette 2011). However, what aligns these works is their attention to the materiality of digitally-oriented artefacts. What I suggest in this thesis is not at odds with these approaches, but rather supplements them. I am interested here in how spaces become topologically folded together through digital connections, and the vibrant matter (Bennett 2010) of non-digital artefacts which are articulated into, and therefore constitutive of, digital geographies.

Media and moral panic

Following Fiske (1996), I have argued that racialized ‘media events’ provide WNs with opportunities to extend their reach beyond the bounded web protocols of the Forum. As key sites of discursive turbulence and struggle, racialized media events are often articulated with circulating moral panics. Analysing the contributions of SF members to discursive struggle around the three case-studies presented in this thesis, I show that in the convergent mediascape (Jenkins 2006) the mechanics of moral panics have fundamentally shifted. The tendency toward ‘news now’ (Sheller 2014) and participatory media culture (see, Jenkins 1992; Deuze 2006; Lievrouw 2006; McCosker & Johns 2014; Highfield 2016), has opened up space for far more intense forms of discursive contestation than ever before. Where moral panics of the 1970s and 1980s relied on right-thinking elites for their genesis and circulation (see, Cohen 1972; Hall et al. 1978), contemporary moral panics can be co-opted, contested, remixed, and recirculated by any IT-literate individual or group – including the panic’s original target.

With this in mind, I analyse and re-theorize the mechanics of moral panic in and for a digital age. In doing so, I extend efforts to re-think the agency of ‘folk devils’ in contesting moral panics (e.g. McRobbie & Thornton 1995; Cohen 2011b; de Young 2013). Here, I make two key contributions. First, I engage with Cohen’s (2011b) efforts to untangle the question of whether it is possible to talk of normatively ‘good’ or ‘bad’ moral panics. Cohen argues in parentheses that:

‘the [moral panics] that we study are invariably bad’ (p. 237). Aside from the problematic assumed ideological commonality with the reader that the universal ‘we’ implies, this normative judgement serves to calcify positions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ without considering for positionality. To account for such potential divergence, I draw on Goode and Ben-Yehuda’s (2010, p.2) sectional understanding of moral panics as often occurring in ‘specific social circles, sectors, categories, or groups.’ In doing so, I encourage a contingent understanding of moral panics. In this way, I assert that rather than ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ moral panics may be strategically *favourable* or *unfavourable* to specific actors and groups. Such orientations to a circulating moral panic are far from clear-cut, and actors often find themselves at the centre of a tangle of often mutually reinforcing panics. As I argue in Chapter Five, a group may find itself favourably and/or unfavourably articulated into a number of different moral panics at any one time.

This leads me to my second contribution to moral panic theory. Here I bring together the literature on moral panic (Cohen 1972; Hall et al. 1978; Goode & Ben-Yehuda 1994; McRobbie & Thornton 1995; Cohen 2011b; de Young 2013) with the literatures on the convergent mediascape (Jenkins 2006; Strover 2013; Glynn 2015) and participatory culture (Jenkins 1992; Deuze 2006; Lievrouw 2006; Deuze et al. 2007; Beer & Burrows 2010; Shifman 2014) to argue that, through contestation and remediation, moral panics have become memetic. In this thesis, I have shown that through new media, contemporary moral panics have become open to far greater contestation and recirculation than ever before. As a result, I argue that a vast range of actors are able to ‘manage’ unfavourable moral panics, whilst exploiting favourable ones. Rather than neatly extending in a top down manner, then, moral panics are now much more rhizomatic with an infinite range of entry points – in the manner of ‘spreadable media’ (Jenkins et al. 2013). In this way, I argue, drawing on Fiske (2010) contemporary moral panics

represent (re)producerly texts, where meaning and direction are coproduced between reader and text.

Racism, morality, and the contingency of race

In Chapter Six, I examine WN repertoires of race as SF members navigate racialized media events. Here, I show – perhaps counter-intuitively given the Forum’s explicit racial ideology – that processes of racialization and moral judgement regarding racist violence are flexible and contingent. Whilst everyday discourses on the Forum rehearse explicit tropes of ‘race war’ and ethnic cleansing, public-facing discourse is often much more sanitised. Gramsci (1971, p.178) contends that ‘it is upon [the terrain of the conjunctural] that the forces of opposition organise’. In other words, even oppositional movements must contend with hegemonic discourse and prevailing structures of feeling.

In analysing SF members’ response to episodes of racialized violence, I draw on Butler’s (2006; 2009) work on ‘grievability’, and Mbembe’s (2003) theory of ‘necropolitics’. In doing so, I argue that SF members apply racialized categories of both ‘whiteness’ and ‘otherness’ in inconsistent and contradictory ways. This leads me to two observations. First, I show that even in this explicitly counter-hegemonic forum, processes of racialization are linked to hegemonic frames. In the context of racialized violence, the state’s involvement invokes a necropolitical agenda and the victim is sealed into the crushing stereotypical objecthood of un-grievability (see, Fanon 2008). Where vigilante white violence is concerned, justification is harder to come by, and SF members move to deny the ‘true whiteness’ of the attacker by reference to ‘un-white’ traits such as mental ill-health or ‘cowardice’. In such cases, the victims are afforded their subjecthood and become grievable.

Indeed, I show in Chapter Five that during racialized media events, SF turns outward, folding broadcast into its typical introspection in an effort to intervene in circulating narratives. Exploiting increased media attention to the Forum, members attempt to manage panics which are unfavourable to a WN agenda and amplify those which are favourable. MSM remediation of SF comment produces a problematically symbiotic relationship whereby news outlets become nodes in a WN broadcast network. Even so, WNs must work within the limits of prevailing structures of feeling, leading to strategically flexible and contingent processes of racialization and moral judgement.

Challenging racial abolitionists (e.g. Roediger 1994; Gilroy 1998; Ware & Back 2002), Saldanha (2006, p.21) advocates for the acknowledgement of ‘a thousand tiny races.’ To do so, he argues that ‘[race] should not be eliminated, but proliferated, its many energies directed at multiplying racial differences so as to render them joyfully cacophonous [...] race exists in its true mode when it is no longer stifled by racism’ (p.21). Whilst I agree with Saldanha (2007, p.192) that ‘it is the plasticity, the creative potential of race, that is important,’ I have shown in this thesis that that such plasticity is seized by WNs as well as antiracists. I show in Chapter Six, that WNs’ deployment of racial categories is contingent and flexible, and such discursive contortions are performed in pursuit of a range of outcomes – from managing the stigma around WN politics, to negotiating questions of white identity. WNism relies on the construction of a panoply of ‘races’ to carve out a degree of legitimacy in divergent contexts. In this case, I argue, the logic behind proliferating race as an inherently antiracist project is flawed.

Instead of emphasising the significance of phenotype (Saldanha 2006; Saldanha 2007; Saldanha & Adams 2012), I advocate for maintaining attention to processes of racialization and their capricious nature. Of course, this requires normative moral and ethical judgements about the kinds of identities which are rooted in modes of domination and those which are rooted in

forms of resistance. Instead of attempting to proliferate race indiscriminately, then, I advocate supporting and nourishing progressive expressions of racialized identity. Conversely, it is necessary to highlight and undermine the unsteady and inconsistent nature of racial categories as they are deployed in reactionary contexts. These are the kinds of issues which must continue to be addressed by antiracist academia. In this context, white antiracist scholars should make an effort to centre marginalized voices, and embrace the ‘treacherous whiteness’ which so unsettles the racializing efforts of WNs.

Digital methods

Finally, this thesis makes three modest contributions to the development of digital methods. First, I assert the importance of continued attention to older social media forms, such as the web forum. Whilst Baym (2015), for example, gives scant attention to web fora – a single line, referring to them in the past tense – I have shown that it is not yet time to move on from considering their importance. Here, my work engages with and extends thinking around the construction of online publics and micropublics (Bruns & Burgess 2011; e.g. Sharma 2013; Papacharissi 2014; McCosker & Johns 2014; Highfield 2016). Where these studies largely focus on active participants in ad hoc publics, in Chapter Five I show the interaction between ‘lurkers’ and the posting members of the Forum.

To this end, I argue for attention to non-participant-participants – such as law enforcement and journalists (and, indeed, academics) – around particular media events. Whilst it is difficult to measure the influence of a covert non-participant on discussion, it is clear to see that the presence of such ‘lurkers’ has an important impact on the behaviour of active members (and perhaps explains the inactivity of others). In this way, non-participant observers become

participants-by-proxy, shaping discursive currents through representing an imagined audience (see, Marwick & Boyd 2011) which serves to influence users' editorial decisions.

This leads me to my second contribution to the social media studies literature. Whilst many scholars have documented the interpersonal relationships of introspective online communities (see, Rheingold 2000; Baym 1999; Baym 2002; Boyd & Ellison 2007; Bowman-Grieve 2009; Evans 2013) and the outward-facing practices of users on more public platforms such as Twitter (see, Bruns & Burgess 2012; Florini 2013; Almgren & Olsson 2015; LeFebvre & Armstrong 2016), there is little work that deals directly with the intermittent public-facing function of seemingly introspective online communities. With comments on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit becoming regular sources for journalists (see, Henry 2007; Hermida 2010; Paulussen & Harder 2014), a better understanding of the consequences of this public-facing posturing is essential.

Finally, I add modestly to considerations of the ethics of covert research on reactionary but marginalized populations online. In Chapter Three, I outline the compound methodological challenges of researching racists in online contexts. Here I discuss the ethics of such work, arguing – contrary to much of the literature (see, Beer & Burrows 2007; Boellstorff 2008; Kozinets 2010; Boellstorff et al. 2012; Miller & Horst 2012a) – for the contingent value and necessity of 'lurking'-as-method. Importantly, I advocate for a situated ethics (Calvey 2008) which considers each project on an individual basis and runs throughout the course of the research. Indeed, I draw on Spicker's (2011) argument that covert research can be justified in contexts where it sheds light on harmful practices, by thinking a little about the complex and nested nature of power and marginalisation. In this thesis I justify covert research on SF members on the grounds that this may be the only way to examine, and potentially disrupt, the dangerous discourses they produce and circulate. Furthermore, it is clear from the outward-

facing strategies of SF users that the news sub-forum is not understood by members as a private space (see, De Koster & Houtman 2008; Lomborg 2012). Nonetheless, further thought is necessary on the ethics of covert research in other racist contexts.

The limitations of this thesis

Although I am satisfied that this thesis provides a number of important theoretical and empirical contributions, it is limited by the parameters in which it is situated. As outlined in the methodology, I made fundamental changes to the empirical base – and therefore focus – of this project at a fairly late stage. I took an opportunistic approach, incorporating Dylann Roof's attack in Charleston which occurred during the planning of the thesis, and seemed to present a fertile case study. This ultimately strengthened the thesis – bringing my attention more directly to racialized violence – however, I now briefly outline three particular weaknesses of this thesis, that I have been unable to rectify.

First, my analysis relies entirely on publicly-available discussion. This is appropriate for analysing the public-facing strategies of SF, but misses, I'm sure, a whole host of important processes and interactions which take place in the back channels of the Forum and on other platforms. The ethical and practical challenges of accessing members' private communication covertly, preclude this approach, whilst the difficulties of access outlined in Chapter Three rule out overt study. In any case, this project places emphasis on public conjunctural discourses and their circulation from, through, and into different media spaces. In terms of this project, the method and the material which it has provided have served me well, but deeper analysis of micro-level interaction may prove difficult.

Second, I have paid attention in this thesis to racialized media events because they are clear sites of contestation, and therefore rich seams for empirical study. As moments of maximum discursive turbulence (Fiske 1996), they give racist voices opportunities to intervene in circulating narratives and to try to (re)direct them. By their contested and contestable nature, however, they are also sites of antiracist struggle, and this can be seen in the strength and ubiquity of the Black Lives Matter movement (see, Ransby 2015; Garza 2016). In many ways, this makes them unrepresentative of the covert and everyday workings of racism (see, Coates 2008; Bonilla-Silva 2012; Doane & Bonilla-Silva 2013). Although not the explicit focus of my project, understanding such insidious forms of racism is essential. Away from the flashpoints of discursive struggle, racist ideas are in constant circulation. A focus on media events alone will never pick up this form of ideological osmosis. However, this insidious and largely covert transmission of extreme ideas into mainstream politics is one way in which structural racism is reproduced (see, Zeskind 2009).

Finally, one of the core arguments in my work revolves around a critique of the remediation of WN discourse by mainstream media. However, throughout this thesis, I quote verbatim from SF – albeit critically – giving attention to their views. Furthermore, as Kilomba (2013, p.38) argues ‘there have been rows of books written [...] in order to comprehend the aggressors. The actual victims of racism, however, have been rapidly forgotten.’ In trying to understand the workings of racism, I have turned my attention to the racists, though I hope it is clear that I have maintained a strong commitment to the victims. In future work, however, it may be important and illuminating to consider the effects on racialized ‘others’ of engaging in such discursive struggles. Daniels (2009b), for example, defends her work from the charge that it lends credibility to, and drives interest in, such sites by highlighting its potentially progressive antiracist outcomes. I wish to echo this defence in relation to my own work.

Future research

Having outlined my findings and contributions, I now want to turn to some suggestions of areas for future research. When I was first planning this project, it was a comparative study of SF and the forum of another racist site called Vanguard News Network (VNN). The two represent quite different modes of digital racism, in terms of both ideology and behaviour. Whilst SF members pride themselves on the Forum's supposed intellectualism and civility – maintained by founder Don Black – VNN is a much more vituperative environment, founded and run by bellicose neo-Nazi Alex Linder.

As I started to gather the empirical material, it became clear that this comparative approach was too vast an undertaking, and I narrowed the focus to SF. This decision was taken since SF is the larger of the two, and garners far more media attention. However, future research into the contrasting media strategies and repertoires of race across different racist fora would advance my theoretical claims, and be of practical use to antiracists. This might also include attention to the increasing prevalence of ad hoc racist communities in below-the-line comment sections of mainstream newspapers online (see, Hughey & Daniels 2013; McCosker 2015), and the growth of virulent racism on sites like Reddit (Hankes 2015).

Members of SF also access multiple other fora and news sites (often including VNN and Reddit). Many contribute actively to these webspaces and the everyday ideological discussions that go on there. Many may even be members of opposing sites, constructing and performing contradictory political identities. A study of individual members and their use of the web (à la Miller 2011) would give deep insight into the lives and motivations of individual activists.

In this thesis, I traced news events and memes as they circulated on SF. An alternative approach, which would show the many influences and iterations of spreadable content, would be

to follow a small number of memes as they move through a range of online settings. Here, the content is held in focus while the context fluctuates. This would contribute to growing area of intellectual endeavour surrounding spreadable media (see, Jenkins et al. 2013; Jenkins 2014; Shifman 2014; Highfield 2016), and underscore the work that goes into circulating racist memes. With the sharp growth of the alt-right, deeper understanding of such illiberal and reactionary movements and the articulation of their discourse into mainstream politics, might highlight points of rupture for antiracist intervention. Finally, more work is needed on digital antiracist praxis. Due to the methodological challenges outlined in Chapter Three, I am frustrated to be unable to make practical recommendations for a digitally-inflected antiracist praxis. Therefore, I would be keen to see a comprehensive project based on digital antiracist action research. The applied and experimental nature of action research would be ideally suited to critically exploring the politics of participatory culture, for example (Lievrouw 2006; Beer & Burrows 2010). Working with antiracists to undermine racism online in this way could help to systematise antiracist approaches and make them more effective.

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